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School Improvement in a Small Island Developing State: the Seychelles

by

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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This thesis is entirely my own original work and no part of it has been published previously. Neither has it been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

This thesis presents an evaluative case study of school improvement initiatives in the Seychelles, in a context specific to small island developing states (SIDS). It examines the complexities of borrowing a school improvement model from a larger and more open system (the UK) and the possibilities for adapting it to the local needs. It also considers the significance of the small island and centralised contexts into which the school improvement model was imported. In so doing, the research attempts to determine the factors that may help schools in the SIDS context to develop the internal capacity to improve and to establish the basis for a possible model for school improvement in SIDS.

The research is significant because it provides originality as the only study of school improvement in Seychelles secondary schools. It also contributes further insights into the development of the Seychelles School Improvement Programme (SIP); it complements the existing knowledge base on the SIP and adds to the scant literature on school improvement in small states and in centralised systems.

The study attempts to capture the multi-faceted nature of the SIP and the multiple forms of people's understanding of it, by examining the most salient aspects of the Programme from the perspectives of different stakeholder groups, through the case study approach. A 40% sample of the country's state secondary schools were studied, using documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews and observation of meetings as the means of data collection.

While the SIP has had far reaching implications for school development in the Seychelles system and school improvement strategies such as development planning and school-based professional development have become institutionalised, schools are yet to take ownership of them. It is hoped that the findings of this study may contribute to educators' reflections on effective teaching and learning as well as inform policy and practice.

Abbreviations used

ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
DAE	Donors to Education in Africa
HoD	Head of Department
HoY	Head of Year
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IGCSE	International General Certificate of Secondary Education
IQEA	Improving the Quality of Education for All
ISIP	International School Improvement Project
NMC	National Minimum Curriculum
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SBM	School-Based Management
SIP	School Improvement Programme
SIT	School Improvement Team
SMT	Senior Management Team
SIPSS	School Improvement Programmes in Small States
TMS	Teacher Management and Support

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Chapter One: General Introduction

Background and overview

Over the past two decades the education systems of many developing and industrialising countries have undergone substantial reforms with the aim of producing more effective schools systems and raising the level of student performance and achievements. The nature of the reforms varies depending on the countries and their unique combinations of social, cultural, historical and political factors. However, many such reforms have been strongly influenced by the principles, as well as the research findings, of the school effectiveness and the school improvement ‘movements’ which started in the United States and the UK in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Reynolds et al, 2001).

Interest in school effectiveness and the impact of schools on students’ learning, dates back to the work of Coleman et al (1966) and Jenks et al (1972) in the USA, which concluded that home background and other socially related factors, rather than the experience of schooling, were the determining variables of students’ achievements. A refusal to accept such findings by other education researchers led to the development of a body of research focussing on the characteristics and the impact of what became known as ‘effective schools’ (eg. Rutter et al, 1977; Brookover and Lezotte, 1977, and Edmonds, 1979). Their main contention is that schools do make a difference to students’ achievements and, mainly through quantitative analysis, they went on to identify numerous factors associated with effective schools.

Alongside the school effectiveness tradition, and to some extent growing from it, came the school improvement developments which investigated, mainly through the use of qualitative data, the processes by which schools could approach change and improve their performance (Hopkins et al, 1994). Over the past three decades, the focus of school improvement approaches has shifted from concerns with curriculum innovations using the top-down model, from emphasis on organisational change and school self-evaluation, to a convergence on aspects related to the enhancement of student outcomes, the professional development of teachers and capacity building encompassing the whole school (Reynolds et al, 2001). According to these authors, the present phase is characterised by ‘a simultaneous focus on process and outcome’ (ibid: 2), thus bringing about a synergy of the school improvement and the school effectiveness perspectives. This considerable body of knowledge continues to grow, and attempts to provide clear indications of what constitutes an effective school, the processes of school development and ways in which improvement can be fostered and sustained in schools (Reynolds et al, 2001).

More recent developments in school improvement research have been guided by certain key concepts which focus on enhancing the internal capacity of schools as a means of improving pupils’ progress. According to Reynolds et al (2001: 2) they include:

- The recognition that schools are the centre of change
- the development of capacity within the school through the professional development of staff
- the key role of school leadership
- harnessing external support as a means of bringing about internal change
- adapting external change to the needs of the school.

While these concepts underpin the major characteristics of effective schools, it is widely acknowledged that the processes by which schools can improve differ widely, depending on the context of schools and the combination and interactions of various institutional and external factors.

Over the course of these developments many school improvement projects and programmes have been initiated. Of particular relevance for developing countries, and in particular for the Seychelles, are international school improvement initiatives such as the International School Improvement Project (ISIP) (Hopkins, 1987), the Improving the Quality of Education for All project (IQEA) (Hopkins and Harris, 1997), and the Commonwealth Secretariat's Teacher Management and Support programme developed through the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA). These projects, among others, have contributed to an extensive knowledge base on school development that has informed several policy initiatives and the establishment of school improvement programmes in various parts of the world (see for example Fullan and Watson, 2000; ADEA, 1993; Levin and Lockheed, 1993; SIP Secretariat, Seychelles, 2000; Bezzina, 1999).

General Aims of the Research

The theoretical underpinnings for this thesis are concepts of school improvement, their evolution over the last two decades and their impact on educational reforms world-wide. These concepts are examined in the light of the specificities of small island developing states (SIDS), namely their tendency towards centralised services, personalised work relationships, and consensus-building (Bray, 1991), as

well as their greater level of vulnerability as a result of their small size, isolation from markets, ecological fragility, geographic dispersion and limited resources (Ballantyne 1998).

The thesis considers the effectiveness of school improvement initiatives in the context of the small island developing state of Seychelles, with a view to determining the factors that may help schools in this context to develop the internal capacity to improve. It also attempts to establish the basis for a possible model for school improvement in SIDS. In order to do this, the Seychelles School Improvement Programme (SIP) is studied and evaluated in relation to policy intentions defined at the time of the implementation of the programme, and in the light of existing literature.

The research investigates the factors that may have an impact on the development of internal capacity in Seychelles secondary schools, particularly in relation to the school improvement strategies adopted in 1996, as part of a national reform aiming to enhance the quality of education at all levels of the school system. The reform was characterised by a greater emphasis on school self-evaluation, the institutionalisation of development planning, school-based professional development and a shift towards a more participative style of leadership. The promotion of greater parental and community involvement was also targeted but very limited development occurred in this area. It is therefore not considered in this study.

Extensive training programmes, together with the establishment of a school improvement support network underpinned this innovation, as a means of developing human capacity and ensuring sustainability (SIP Secretariat, 2000; Ministry of Education, 2000c). The research thus considers the strategies just mentioned, with special reference to the development of people within the interpersonal and organisational arrangements and capacities of the schools. This is because people remain the most important assets of SIDS, while being at the same time one of the contributing factors to their vulnerability (Centre for Environment and Development, 2002). The Seychelles SIP bears this out through its strong focus on the on-going professional development of staff, the formal training of school leaders in educational leadership, and the provision of support to school-based initiatives that enhance teaching and learning (Ministry of Education, 2000c).

Specific Aims of the Research

More specifically the research aims to:

- Examine the main principles underpinning school improvement trends and school improvement practices.
- Explore the extent to which there is shared vision (as proposed in schools' development plans) in the sampled schools.
- Determine the extent to which the schools' development plans are considered central to actions related to teaching and learning - actions taken within the school during a given period of time.

- Investigate the extent to which staff professional development exists in the sampled schools.
- Investigate the extent to which participative leadership styles exist in the sampled schools.
- Identify the characteristics of these phenomena and the conditions under which they occur, and consider them in relation to similar phenomena in other SIDS as far as possible.
- Examine teachers' perceptions of the influence of these phenomena on their classroom practice.
- Identify those factors that may enhance the schools' internal capacities to improve.

Analysis of the Seychelles school improvement model is guided initially by contemporary models of school improvement which focus on building people's capacities and pupil achievement (Hopkins, 2001; Hopkins and Jackson, 2002), but they are not central to the study. Rather, emphasis remains on evaluating the Seychelles model, which was designed, in principle, to meet the requirements of its education system. The model is compared and contrasted, where appropriate, with the literature on school improvement initiatives in other SIDS. Furthermore, the researcher remains responsive to the research situation as it is, allowing for the possibility of emergent theoretical models to occur.

The research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Do the sampled schools have stated visions and do members of the school show allegiance to them?

2. What are the main characteristics of development planning in Seychelles schools, as represented by the sampled schools?
3. To what extent is development planning seen by the management and staff of the schools as a tool for school improvement?
4. What are the main characteristics of professional development in the schools?
5. In what ways do management and staff link professional development activities to school improvement?
6. To what extent are these professional development activities important to them?
7. To what extent do management and staff think the professional development activities of the school impact on their classroom practice?
8. What are the characteristics of school leadership in the sampled schools?
9. To what extent do headteachers and deputies think they practice participative styles of leadership and why?
10. To what extent are the phenomena and conditions emerging from the foregoing questions specific to SIDS?
11. What are the factors that may enhance the schools' internal capacities to improve?

The research is guided by a definition of school improvement proposed by Hopkins (2001), as revised by Hopkins and Jackson (2002: 2), which takes into account the evolution of the process over the past three decades:

It is a strategy for achieving positive educational change that focuses on student achievement by modifying classroom practice whilst simultaneously adapting the management, leadership and learning arrangements within the school to support teaching and learning.

This definition is considered most suitable because it refers to the dynamic relationships between the component parts of the school improvement process, with a clear focus on student achievement. It also reflects the spirit and intentions of the Seychelles SIP from its outset.

Research methodology

The greater part of the research is based on an evaluative case study (Bassey, 2002) of a sample of state comprehensive secondary schools in Seychelles, which are involved in the SIP. Four secondary schools, ranging from rural, urban and other island schools, constitute the purposive sample studied. This represents a 40% sample of the country's secondary schools. The research takes a qualitative approach because it aims to investigate the multiple forms of understandings and realities of people involved in the SIP (Cohen et al, 2003), within the real life context of the secondary schools they operate in. The size of the school system and the evaluative nature of the research (from multiple perspectives), make it possible to use the case study as the main research approach.

Documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews and observation of SIP related meetings constitute the methods of data collection. Documents examined were those most directly connected with the SIP at both Ministry of Education and school levels. The interviewees were from three distinct groups: school improvement team (SIT) members which also include the senior management team (SMT) of the school; non SIT members from among the teaching staff; and Ministry based SIP leaders. This was to ensure the possibility of obtaining multiple perspectives, along with greater reliability and validity of the data.

The researcher's position as a senior employee of the Seychelles Ministry of Education facilitated access to documents and schools. However, the fact that she has also been a participant in the development and implementation of the Seychelles SIP since its inception in 1996 and her association, especially in the minds of teachers and headteachers, with the central Ministry authorities, may have influenced the responses of participants involved in the research. The context of SIDS where everyone is personally known to one another, and where professional relationships are often interlinked with personal ones (Bray, 1991), may also have been a significant factor. On the other hand, given the existence of reflexivity in most research orientations (Morrison, 2002), an awareness of the participative role of the researcher may have brought particular insights to the research project.

Whilst the researcher's awareness of these challenges may have helped in maintaining professional working relationships and a degree of objectivity, she also ensured that she obtained schools' and respondents' informed consent, and maintained confidentiality with respect to all data collected. In addition, she triangulated information gathered from respondents with documentary evidence and observations.

The theoretical context of the study

The school improvement project instituted in the Seychelles school system was inspired by developments in school improvement approaches occurring in Britain in the mid-1990s. The theoretical framework for the study is therefore based on

the concepts of school improvement as a process for initiating and managing change and the fundamental principles underlying these concepts maintain the following: ‘student achievement must be the *raison d’être* for any educational change’ (Hopkins et al 1994: 12, original italics) and further, that ‘change, if it is to mean anything at all, has to have an impact at the classroom level – on the hearts and minds of teachers and students’ (ibid: 24).

A detailed discussion of the theoretical perspectives of school improvement pertinent to this study is given in Chapter Two.

National context of the study

Seychelles education system - background

The education system of Seychelles has been strongly influenced by the principles and practices of the British education system of the post-war era. The islands, originally colonised by the French, became a full British colony in 1814 through the Treaty of Paris, and remained so for over a hundred and fifty years. Seychelles gained its independence from the British in 1976. The education system has its roots in the colonial developments of that period, which was characterised by only limited interest in mass education of any kind on the part of the colonial powers. For most of the 19th century, education was a matter left to the churches – mainly the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches – and other charitable concerns (Domingue 2001). Consequently the Church played a significant role in the institutionalisation of primary schooling, a process which was enmeshed in long standing debates over religion and language. Institutionalised and compulsory

education was finally established approximately 170 years after the first settlers arrived from French colonised Mauritius in 1770. The country remains predominantly Roman Catholic in religious orientation, and English is still one of the official languages as well as one of the media of instruction in education, along with Creole and French.

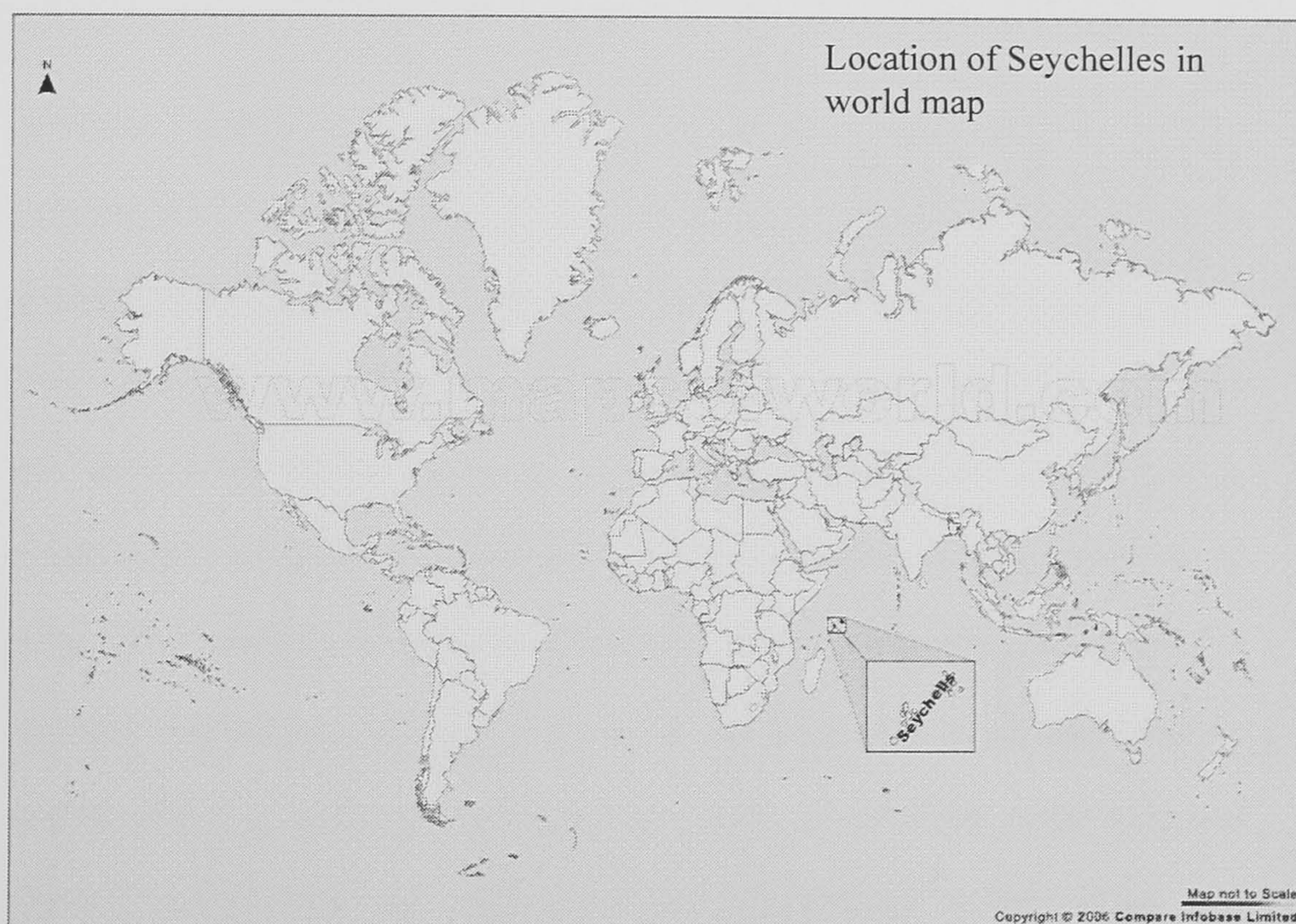


Figure 1.1: Location of Seychelles

Located in the western Indian Ocean, four degrees south of the Equator and approximately 1,600 km off the coast of East Africa, the Republic of Seychelles comprises 115 islands, scattered over some 500,000km² of sea. The country has a total land area of 450km².

88% of the total population of 80,410 live on the island of Mahé, which accounts for approximately 35% of the total land area. A further 10% live on two other

smaller islands – Praslin and La Digue - to be found within a 40 kilometre radius of the main island, while the remaining 2% are scattered over the other islands of the archipelago. The country is characterised by its geographical remoteness and an unusually high degree of geographical dispersion. It also has the highest per capita GDP among African countries – over US\$ 7,000 - and ranks highest on social indicators (Ministry of Education, 2000c).

A sudden change of government in 1977, and the establishment of a single political party system, brought a re-orientation of education principles towards comprehensive and inclusive education for all, free of charge. Private schools were abolished, schools became completely secular and the compulsory school age was set at 5½ to 16 years. Government policies were guided by the fundamental principles of ‘education for all, education for life, education for personal and national development’ (Ministry of Education 1984), which had far-reaching implications for the type of schools and the quality of education that the system wished to deliver. A comprehensive model of schooling, comprising nine years of primary plus two years of residential education in two village style communities, was established in 1982, along with a centrally planned national curriculum and policies for the mainstreaming of students, except for the most severely disabled. The concept of the residential centres, named the National Youth Service (NYS) Villages, was modelled on the Cuban secondary school system of the time, and it required all students to spend two years in rural residential learning centres, following a curriculum that combined formal classroom based studies with food production activities. This form of education aimed at developing ‘the whole person’ – ‘the heart and the mind’ - through

community living and sharing (Ministry of Education, undated: 2). While the system was based on sound principles of educational equity and integrated learning, the model used was perceived by many parents as too radical a departure from the commonly held view of 'normal schooling' and it eventually succumbed to pressures to shift back to more traditional lines of schooling (Purvis, 2004).

Present situation

In a revision of educational goals in 2000, greater emphasis was placed on principles of 'education for empowerment, education for productivity, education for social cohesion and education for global participation' (Ministry of Education, 2000b: 2) with a strong focus on the improvement of quality through policies that should enable schools to cater for the wide range of abilities characteristic of comprehensive school systems. These included the initiatives targeting development planning at school level, greater accountability through a process of quality assurance and reviews of the national curriculum and national assessment strategies (Purvis, 2004).

While these initiatives are tending towards some devolution of control to schools, the system remains highly centralised in terms of staffing, infrastructural and resource management, and budgeting. The Schools Division of the Ministry recruits and allocates staff to all state education and training institutions, resources are centrally purchased and managed, as are infrastructural resources. The budget is centrally allocated and tightly controlled by the finance section of the Ministry of Education. Private education and training institutions account for only two percent of the educational provision nationally.

The budget allocation to education has remained between 11% and 13% of national expenditure annually over the past two decades (Ministry of Education 2000c), which is an indication of the government's commitment to social welfare policies. From among 31 African countries, Seychelles ranks fourth for the proportion of its GDP spent on education (UNESCO 2003). During the same period an extensive programme of building renovations and general upgrading of school facilities was implemented. There are 33 state pre-schools or crèches, usually located next to the 23 district primary schools, and 10 secondary schools located regionally on the main island of Mahe (four in rural areas and four in the town area), plus two others on the smaller islands of Praslin and La Digue. Their sizes range from 711 to 1014 pupils (2005 figures). Eight out of the ten schools were headed by women in 2005, and 75% of other senior management team members were women. A zoning policy obliges children to attend school in the district of their families' residence. About 95% of all children aged between 3 ½ and 16 years attend the state schools. The remaining 5% go to private schools. These were reinstated in 1993, and currently there are three.

Further and higher education is provided through nine different post-secondary institutions (all state-owned) offering courses ranging from one-year certificates to four-year diplomas. Generally about 70% of the full year group population (an average of 1,320 yearly) gain access to full-time courses. The remaining 30% may join part-time training programmes or seek employment.

Whilst Seychelles has no university at present, a number of linkage programmes with universities overseas enable students to study at degree or post-graduate level through split-site or distance learning programmes. Others – 100 candidates per year on average – go directly to universities overseas.

The table below gives the distribution of the 21,420 children and young people, aged between 3 ½ and 19 years, in full-time education in 2006. They represent 26% of the total population of the country (MISD, 2003).

<i>Level</i>	<i>Duration</i>	<i>2006 Enrolment</i>	<i>%</i>
Creches/ pre-school	2 years	2823	13.2
Primary Schools	6 years	8910	41.6
Secondary Schools	5 years	7756	36.2
Post-Secondary	1 – 4 years	1931	9.0
Total		21,420	100%

Table 1.1 Children and young people in full time education in 2006

Source: Ministry of Education Statistics

Note: Figures for Crèches do not include private day-care centres

With a population growth rate of 1.2% per annum, school enrolment has remained fairly stable over the past twenty years, and the above figures are typical of the distribution of students within the state system.

Schools and further education institutions are relatively well-staffed with the pupil – teacher ratios at 15:1 in primary, 20:1 in secondary and 10:1 in post secondary institutions (Ministry of Education, 2006 education statistics). The Ministry’s education statistics of 1985 to 2006 indicate only small fluctuations in these ratios. At the start of 2006, there were 1,582 teachers in the education system and

88.4 % of them had received some form of pedagogical training ranging from one-year certificates to degrees and postgraduate certificates. Almost all primary school teachers are Seychellois but, in secondary and post secondary institutions, 11.5% of teachers are expatriates.

Quality Improvement - the School Improvement Programme and other reforms

The adoption of a free and comprehensive school system has provided access to general education for all, but the main challenge faced by the education system remains the provision of access to appropriate and meaningful education. The system is still unable to cater effectively for all abilities and ensure success for all (Chrington, 1990).

The most recent reforms, outlined in the Ministry of Education's Strategic Plan 2000 to 2004 (Ministry of Education 2000d), bring together a number of inter-related projects which aim to consolidate the achievements of the earlier reforms and promote substantial improvements in the quality of education throughout the system. The most significant of these projects is the national School Improvement Programme (SIP) launched in 1995. It aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning and student outcomes by creating a culture of self-evaluation and collaborative planning in schools. It also intends to empower staff to manage the process of change within their schools, with support from external agencies (SIP Secretariat, 2000). The main strategies used are the institutionalisation of the process of development planning, the promotion of school-based professional

development, the promotion of greater community participation and the strengthening of school leadership.

The SIP was introduced in all primary and secondary schools in 1996, with the support and assistance of the Commonwealth Secretariat, which, through its Donors to African Education programme, contributes to the work of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA). The participation of the Ministry of Education in the activities of the ADEA's working group on Teacher Management and Support led to the establishment of a Seychelles 'Country Working Group' (CWG) in 1993, with responsibility for developing a Country Action Plan aiming to improve teacher development, management and support nationally. The Group comprised senior managers from within the Ministry headquarters as well as headteacher and teacher representatives. After wide-ranging debate and consultation, the CWG decided on 'making school-based development the central axis of its Country Action Plan' (SIP Secretariat, 2000: 7). The plan was endorsed by the Ministry's main partners in this project, namely the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Centre for British Teachers, which sponsored the training of headteachers and other leaders of the project.

A model for school improvement for Seychelles was then proposed, based on a number of key concepts (listed below) gleaned through participation in international seminars and workshops, and contacts with leading researchers in the field at the time:

- Schools as the centre of change
- Co-ordinated support from the centre based on clear assessment of needs

- Staff development being central to school improvement
- Key role of evaluation
- Collaborative culture
- Action research
- School-based curriculum development
- Development planning as a key tool to manage change

(ibid, 2000: 8)

A School Improvement Project was drawn up aiming to ‘build capacity for planning, implementing, supporting and monitoring school improvement’ (ibid, 2000: 8). The Country Working Group became the Steering Committee for the project, its main aims being the provision of leadership and support to the SIP and advocating for ‘a more participative and supportive process of planned reform and development in schools’ (ibid, 2000: 9).

Following initial training of school leaders in the process of self-evaluation and development planning, all state schools initiated the process, assisted by members of the Steering Committee. A planning cycle was of three years and the project implementation was guided by an action plan devised by the Steering Committee. The major support structure for the SIP was a secretariat established within the Ministry of Education in 1995, together with the appointment of five School Improvement (SI) co-ordinators who were to assist schools, on a regional basis, with their school improvement processes. They work through school improvement teams (SITs), which are school-level, broad-based teams, with responsibility for the planning and implementation of the school development plans. Emphasis on school-based professional development was further reinforced by the appointment of a professional development facilitator (PDF) in each school; generally they are experienced teachers who assume the additional

responsibility for planning and implementing professional development activities specified in the development plans of their schools.

Schools are now in their third planning cycles and the programme has achieved high visibility throughout the system. A first evaluation of the SIP was carried out jointly by the Seychelles Ministry of Education and the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) of South Africa in 2001, in primary schools only. The study highlighted a number of successes, especially in terms of providing a common vision for the school community, greater staff involvement in school improvement activities and increased collaboration among and within schools. However, the evaluation did not directly assess the quality of teaching and learning and furthermore, since no baseline data had previously existed, methodologically the evaluation exercise was designed as baseline research with a view to using the findings as a benchmark for future evaluations (Ministry of Education / HSRC, 2002). A similar evaluation exercise was carried out in secondary schools in 2002, but so far only an interim report has been produced.

Closely linked to the SIP is the establishment, in 2000, of a Quality Assurance Service, which ensures the external evaluation of state schools. In consultation with schools and other partners, the section developed a framework of performance indicators, which are used by schools for their own self evaluation as well as for the purposes of external evaluation. These are intended to strengthen the links between the two levels of evaluation of schools' performance.

The further training of school leaders and managers, up to Masters degree level in educational leadership, was started in 2002 through a joint project with a British university. It is expected that this qualification will eventually become a requirement for aspiring headteachers in the state system. In view of the crucial role played by effective leadership in school development (Bush and Coleman 2000), the system will be looking to the newly trained heads to ensure the further institutionalisation of school improvement processes.

Support for school improvement is also being provided by the teacher training institution – the National Institute of Education – which has, through a recent review, incorporated school improvement processes in its main training programmes. The Institute also works in close partnership with schools' subject leaders in the development of the national curriculum for schools, aiming to bring about greater integration of subject areas and to establish clearer levels of progression.

Other reforms targeting substantial improvements in education quality include the introduction of a single examination system at the end of secondary schooling, the introduction of student profiling in secondary schools, the standardisation of training programmes at post secondary level as well as increasing access to education and training through open and distance learning.

These initiatives are all underpinned by policies promoting the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) across the system, both at organisational and at capacity-building levels. (Ministry of Education, 2001 and 2003b). The

capacity of a small education system to maintain and support so many initiatives at once is a concern but at the same time, it could be argued, they are an indication of the national commitment to quality improvements throughout the education system.

Summary of Chapter One and Overview of the Thesis

This chapter places in context the main aims of the research and the questions that are examined in relation to the Seychelles School Improvement Programme. The research is considered as an evaluative case study guided by the principles of school improvement and concepts related to the specificities of small island developing states.

Issues raised in this chapter are dealt with in greater detail in Chapter Two which reviews the literature pertinent to the evolution of school improvement concepts, theories and strategies. The chapter also considers their impact on specific educational reforms, on school improvement initiatives in three small island states and the Seychelles School Improvement Programme in particular.

Chapter Three discusses the research methodology employed in this study, providing justification for the use of the case study approach. It also outlines the procedures used to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected. Chapters Four, Five, Six, Seven and Eight present the data from the Ministry based SIP leaders and the four case study schools.

Chapter Nine provides an analysis of the findings based on the documentary evidence, interviews and observation of SIT meetings with regard to the Ministry based SIP leaders and the four schools, while Chapter Ten concludes this study. It briefly reviews the findings in the light of the research questions and considers the significance of this research for the Seychelles SIP and for school improvement in SIDS.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter presents an overview of the literature on theory, research and practice related to school improvement, with a view to establishing the underlying assumptions and knowledge base behind the research questions investigated in this study. It outlines the different phases of the evolution of concepts and models of school improvement, illustrating a shift of focus from targeting change at organisational level to changes at classroom level, in teaching and learning. In view of the issues raised by the research questions, this literature review discusses the most commonly used strategies for school improvement and the application of some of these in three international school improvement projects (the ISIP, the IQEA and the TMS) which informed and influenced the development of the Seychelles SIP. These projects, together with others being implemented in SIDS, further serve to illustrate the diversity of interpretations of school improvement concepts and the significance of context specificity. They also point to the most salient factors for school improvement in SIDS. The issues highlighted above are finally explored in relation to the Seychelles SIP, particularly in terms of the strategies employed in bringing about school improvement and the role of teachers and school leaders in the process.

The chapter is organised in four sections. The first section considers concepts and models of school improvement as they have evolved over the past twenty years, and discusses school improvement strategies relevant to this research. The second section examines the impact of such concepts and models on a number of significant international efforts to improve the effectiveness of schools. The third

section addresses the issues of school improvement in small island developing states and the question of context specificity, while in the fourth section the focus narrows to the Seychelles School Improvement Programme and its development.

Concepts and models of school improvement

Historical perspectives

As noted by Fullan (1991), every decade has seen new perspectives on educational change sweeping across school systems. According to Reynolds et al (2001:1), school improvement as ‘a distinct body of approaches and scholars/practitioners’ took shape in the late 1970s and early 1980s, largely in response to the challenges of educational change led by central education authorities, in top-down fashion. Hopkins (2001:36) refers to this as the ‘school development phase’, where schools’ self-evaluation was the main strategy used for managing change. A major driving force for school improvement at the time was the OECD’s International School Improvement Project (ISIP). It built on earlier school development projects but, according to Hopkins and Jackson (2002: 2), the difference was that it reflected a ‘more holistic and systemic view of educational change’. The ISIP will be discussed in greater detail in the next section of this chapter. However, it should be noted here that, in the view of Reynolds et al (2001), school improvement initiatives during this phase generally tended to be fragmented and only loosely connected with improving students’ learning outcomes.

Concurrent with the school improvement initiatives of that period – late 1970s and early 1980s - major studies in school effectiveness were published (Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000a), which led to further research on the correlations between effective schools and the factors that made them effective. This finally brought consensus on the characteristics of effective schools (Bennett and Harris, 1999) but did not shed much light on *how* to bring about the desired changes. The school improvement ‘movement’ attempted to answer this *how* question and, through the advocacy of a number of researchers at the time (see Reynolds et al, 1993; Hopkins et al 1994; Gray et al 1996), there was a convergence of the school improvement and school effectiveness perspectives in the early 1990s, which Reynolds et al (2001: 1) consider as ‘the second phase of the development of school improvement’. This phase was characterised by the large-scale adoption of school improvement plans and site-based management as the main strategies for improvement (Hopkins, 2001).

The third phase of school improvement is characterised by a shift away from restructuring strategies and formal processes such as development planning, towards more fundamental and less tangible aspects of schools and schooling, a process described by Fullan (1996) as ‘reculturing’. Hopkins and Reynolds (2001) consider the following as the most salient features of this phase of school improvement:

- A focus on teaching and learning and pupils’ outcomes;
- An increasing awareness of the importance of capacity building;
- The use of different kinds of school generated data to measure quality and improvement, and

- A commitment to vision building as a means of bringing about cultural change.

The Improving the Quality of Education for All (IQEA) project, discussed in the next section, exemplifies projects typical of this phase of school improvement (Reynolds et al, 2001).

Theoretical perspectives

Definitions

‘School improvement is a fuzzy term widely employed to cover a multitude of changes in schools’ (Gray et al (1999:37). Hopkins and Lagerweij (1996:59) refer to it as a ‘process of trial and error, in which insight grows, as experience with attempts at educational change grows’. In the first phase of school improvement the most useful working definition, according to Hopkins and Lagerweij (ibid), was that which derived from the approach used in the ISIP, where the focus was on the school as the centre of change, and the ‘internal conditions’ of schools. Then school improvement was defined as:

A systematic sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more schools, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively. (van Velzen et al, 1985: 48)

However, while the focus here is clearly on the school, emphasis remained on organisational change rather than on considerations of impact on students’ achievements (Reynolds et al, 2001). A definition that does take this factor into account is proposed by Hopkins et al (1994: 3):

A distinct approach to educational change that enhances student outcomes as well as strengthening the school’s capacity for managing change. In this sense school improvement is about raising student achievement through focusing on the teaching-learning process and the conditions which support it.

Stoll and Fink (1996: 43) also maintain that ‘school improvement’s ultimate aim... is to enhance pupil progress, achievement and development. This is the bottom line’.

With the ‘rapprochement’ between the school effectiveness and school improvement traditions in the mid-1990s, Reynolds et al (2001: 5) provided what they considered to be a ‘tighter’ definition of effectiveness and improvement which emphasises the significance of value added to students’ learning:

If effectiveness describes above-expectation pupil academic performance, improvement is an sustained upward trend in effectiveness. An improving school is thus one which increases its effectiveness over time – the value-added it generates for pupils rises for successive cohorts.

The concept of ‘value-added’, and the methodologies used to assess it, also grew out of these merging trends (Reynolds et al, *ibid*). The aim was to take into consideration, in measurements of effectiveness and improvement, ‘individual pupils’ *progress* as well as the *outcomes* of their learning’ (MacGilchrist et al, 1997: 1, original italics). This should involve the collection of qualitative as well as quantitative data about students’ performance, moving away from comparisons of raw test results. In that way, the authors argue, it should be possible to gauge the value added by schools, especially when comparing schools with similar intakes. They noted that the concept had made ‘a significant impact on schools, particularly in helping staff realise the need to track and monitor pupil progress and not just concentrate on outcomes’ (*ibid*: 2).

Hopkins and Jackson (2002: 2) present a more dynamic definition of school improvement in which the notion of ‘the school’s capacity for development’ is central, and where capacity is defined as the ‘internal organisational

characteristics' of schools. The authors, along with several other educational researchers (eg. Stoll and Fink, 1996; Harris, 2001), consider 'capacity' to be one of the crucial elements for improvement and hence:

it is a strategy for achieving positive educational change that focuses on student achievement by modifying classroom practice whilst simultaneously adapting the management, leadership and learning arrangements within the school to support teaching and learning (Hopkins and Jackson, 2000: 2).

However, even with more specific definitions such as these, the possibility for wide interpretations of concepts of school improvement remains. Harris and Hopkins (2000: 9) for instance point to the persisting tendency 'for schools to focus on change efforts at the level of the school rather than the level of the classroom'. They argue that this often leads schools to equate school improvement with re-structuring. Hopkins and Reynolds (2001: 467 - 468) believe 'the difficulty of focusing on classrooms' arise largely because of poor conceptualisation of the links between the school and classroom levels, which in turn is the result of limited research in this area, an emphasis on 'academic achievement outcomes' and perceptions of the process of learning as mainly passive.

Ouston (1999: 172) notes that earlier school improvement projects assumed that 'schools were rational organisations, that their processes were linear, and their feedback loops were negative'. Such assumptions suggest that less successful schools could improve by emulating more successful ones, but as she points out, this is not the case. She believes that there must be a theory of school improvement and 'a dynamic model of school processes' (ibid) that explains how the organisation functions and how its key parts inter-relate.

Theories and models of School Improvement

While developments in school improvement over the past three decades have given rise to a range of different strategies, approaches and models (to be discussed below), generally these do not seem to have emanated from firmly established theoretical bases. Hargreaves (2001) points to this with reference to the model for enhancing school ethos proposed by Rutter et al (1979) in their study of school effects:

The fields of school effectiveness and, later, of school improvement, have been dominated, at least in Britain and much of the English-speaking world, by the model (rather than an explicit theory) on which this pioneering study relied (ibid: 487).

He goes on to explain (ibid: 488) that:

A model should derive from a theory: it must be more than a set of measured variables that correlate with measured outcomes. A useful theory contains a relatively small set of concepts in explicit relationships, and measured variables should be capable of being contained within the concepts. When integrated into a coherent whole, the concepts become a theory from which testable hypotheses can be derived to guide research.

Hopkins (1996: 31) also admits to this weakness in the literature:

Even the best of school improvement work has failed to elaborate *theories of school development* or begun in any sustained way to develop and evaluate a range of *models of school improvement intervention*. Without serious reflection on these two key elements it is unlikely that strategies for school improvement will contribute to the enhancement of student achievement that its rhetoric heralds (original italics).

Hopkins et al (1997: 402) further posit that the tendency to place emphasis on improving schools' performance by mobilising change efforts at organisational level, and thus concentrating mainly on managerial and administrative change, is the consequence of

the relative absence ... of a sound theoretical understanding of what constitute the schools' capacity for development. It is our view that this capacity for development should be the main focus of any effort to improve any school.

Similarly, Bennett and Harris (1999: 534) believe the absence of a sound theoretical basis and a lack of ‘debate about the underlying principles of school improvement’ have limited the development of theories that might have truly linked the two research traditions of school effectiveness and school improvement. They maintain that ‘even the best examples of school improvement are only just beginning to develop a range of models of school improvement interventions’ (ibid).

Perhaps, as Hopkins and Jackson (ibid: 4) suggest, this is related to researchers’ and practitioners’ concerns with the practicalities of providing ‘active tools and models able to support school leaders with the process of improvement and raising student achievement’. Reynolds et al (1996: 88) however, seem to point to other shortcomings when they note that in school improvement research:

we have for far too long been content with anecdotal evidence and perceptual data collected unsystematically. If the field is to be true to its rhetoric, then serious questions must be asked about theory and strategy, which also must be tested empirically.

Proposed theories

Some of the authors mentioned above go on to formulate possible school improvement theories and models. To give an indication of the evolution of these developments, the theoretical frameworks are presented in chronological order.

Hopkins (1996: 33) proposes a theory of school development in which the ‘successful’ school is considered as one that ‘has the capacity to innovate and change as well as having some clarity over the educational values that inform its work’. He defines school development as ‘the process through which schools

adapt external changes to internal purpose' (ibid). Schools identify priorities for change which are formulated within coherent strategies, within the context of its internal conditions. This often brings about a period of destabilisation and, if overcome, will lead to changes to the culture of the school. Cultural change over successive cycles of successful innovation reduces the destabilising effects of the change process and promotes the school's capacity to develop further. Hopkins (ibid: 37) summarises this process as follows: '*schools continue to develop by adapting external change to internal purpose through a process of structural and cultural accommodation*' (original italics). And gradually 'the emerging culture then stabilises, legitimises and even routinises the structural conditions which form the essential conditions for the new culture'.

Ouston (1999), observes that such a theoretical framework (as proposed by Hopkins) seems to consider schools as rational organisations, with linear processes which are barely affected by the dynamic forces resulting from the interactions of the people within them. She argues that a school improvement theory should be built 'on schools as organisations, on individual and social psychology, and on the causal links between school management, classroom practice and learning' (ibid, 1999: 173). In view of the context specificity of effective change, she believes that teachers 'need to develop their own theory to understand why certain practices are successful.' The basis of such theorising would be '*very frequent formative reviews*' (ibid) of innovations which would go through the following cycles: 'plan it, do it, review and study it, and change it. Then do it again and again', while treating the 'study' phase as the most crucial aspect 'as it is here that personal theory and understanding are developed' (ibid).

Bennett and Harris (1999) use the concept of power from organisational theory to develop a model that may serve as a means of bringing a unifying dimension to the fields of school effectiveness and school improvement. Starting from the assumption that everything that is achieved in any organisation is the result of interactions between its members, they suggest that all organisational relationships are influenced by the following factors: 'structure, culture and the distribution of power' (ibid: 537). Defining power as 'the resources which can be called upon in an exchange relationship through which one individual causes another to act in a particular way' (p539), the authors identify four types of such resources, and argue that organisational structures and cultures provide legitimacy for power resources. Therefore, according to their model, it is important in future school improvement and school effectiveness research to consider the relationships between structure, culture and power in relation to organisational change and development. However, they acknowledge that this would require the development of new research methodologies in school improvement, as existing ones are too limited in scale and potential to undertake such a task. This may be one of the reasons why this model does not appear to have been trialled by other researchers so far.

The theoretical framework proposed by Hargreaves (2001) derives from 'capital theory' and it comprises four 'master concepts' relating to outcomes, leverage, intellectual capital and social capital. Two subsidiary concepts are linked to each of the main ones which are defined as follows: 'The *outcomes* of a school represent both the extent to which its overt goals are achieved and any unintended consequences of the processes involved' (ibid: 488). And outcomes are

considered to be of two broad kinds: cognitive and moral. *Leverage* is defined as ‘the quality and quantity of effected change on students’ intellectual and moral state as a function of the level of teachers’ invested energy’ (ibid: 489). High leverage may be achieved through innovation and evidence-based practice. *Intellectual capital* refers to ‘the sum of the knowledge and experience of the school’s stakeholders that they could deploy to achieve the school’s goals’ (ibid: 490) and the subsidiary concepts are the capacity to create new knowledge and the transfer of knowledge. *Social capital* is ‘defined in terms of its cultural and structural components’ (ibid: 490), the cultural part being associated with the level of trust between people while the structural aspect is represented by networks which bring people together. Hargreaves suggests that in order to improve outcomes schools need to increase leverage through increasing intellectual capital – by creating and transferring knowledge; and for this to happen social capital is critical. He believes a better understanding of the relationships between these various conceptual levels within the framework should provide a valuable tool for the analysis and further exploration of school effectiveness factors and school improvement processes.

Insofar as the theory focuses on the relationships between the component parts of the framework, Hargreaves’ model shows certain similarities with that proposed by Bennett and Harris (1999). However, the former theory lacks the dynamic common element within such relationships, represented by power resources in the latter model. They both also take as starting points the school’s capacity for development, and attempt to unravel the complexities involved in operationalising the concept of capacity. At the same time both theories somewhat ignore the

‘pupil dimension’ in their considerations of increasing capital and harnessing power resources, as observed by Flecknoe (2002: 421). He contends that the underlying assumption seems to be that education is ‘something essentially done to children by teachers’.

School Improvement Approaches and Strategies

In addition to the theoretical frameworks just discussed, there is a wide range of what are variously termed models, approaches and strategies for school improvement that have evolved through the operationalisation of its underlying concepts. They tend to be closely linked to specific projects at the level of districts or individual schools. As Dimmock (2002: 137) observed, there is ‘a bewildering range of design, programmes /models’, and he attempted to classify them in an effort to assist schools in making more informed choices about models and designs for improvement. The ambiguity is further perpetrated by the use of the terms ‘models’, ‘approaches’ and ‘strategies’ interchangeably in school improvement writing (Dimmock, *ibid*).

In a review carried out for the UK Department for Education and Science, Reynolds et al (2001) examined 22 different school improvement initiatives, based on a variety of models and approaches, involving anything between a hundred or so schools and one school. They include the Improving the Quality of Education for All project, Schools make a Difference, the Halton Effective Schools Project, the Accelerated Schools project, the Manitoba School Improvement project, the Coalition of Essentials Schools, the High Reliability Schools, the Success for All project, the Dutch National School Improvement

Project, along with more localised or individual school programmes such as the Lewisham Improving Schools project and the Pasadena High School in Southern California, to name but a few.

Differences in the interpretation of what constitutes ‘school improvement’ were also evident in the deliberations of a recent Pan-Commonwealth Small States Conference in Malta, on ‘School Evaluation Best Practices’ (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003). School improvement initiatives ranged from system-wide innovations such as the Seychelles SIP to more topical projects related to specific issues such as discipline and teacher training in the Gambia. As Hopkins (1996: 31) explained, it is often used in its common-sense meaning, as a collective noun, relating to ‘general efforts to make schools better places for pupils and students to learn’.

The above comments notwithstanding, a number of approaches and strategies for managing change and ultimately to bring about school improvement, have evolved in conjunction with the different phases of development in school improvement research. They have been widely used, in a variety of contexts, over the past four decades. The main ones are:

- school self evaluation or school-based review.
- development planning,
- school-based / site-based management,
- organisational learning and capacity building.

Most of these approaches and strategies have been adapted from corporate managerialist approaches (Dempster et al, 1994: 25) and the development plan is ‘the main planning instrument, the equivalent of the corporate strategic plan’.

School based review and evaluation

The initial emphasis in the school improvement literature was on self-evaluation or school-based review (Bollen, 1996) which was defined by Van Velzen (1982: 51), with particular reference to the ISIP, as:

A systematic inspection (description and analysis) by a school, a sub-system or an individual (teacher, school leader) of the actual functioning of the school ... it should always be the first step in a systematic school improvement process to gather diagnostic information in order to improve the functioning of the school.

McLaughlin’s (1991: 142) definition considers self-evaluation at the level of the individual:

An aspect of reflection that is concerned with defining one’s concerns, establishing criteria for success and determining the most appropriate methods to judge the effects of one’s actions in the classroom. Self-evaluation involves carefully observing and analysing one’s actions and interpreting the consequences of what one has done.

According to Hopkins and Reynolds (2001), the process of school based review or self evaluation as a common approach for managing change was characteristic of the first phase of school improvement practices, in the early 1980s. Schools that participated in the ISIP made extensive use of this strategy as it provided a means of managing the change process and helped to enhance institutional renewal (Hopkins and Lagerweij, 1996). Meuret and Morlaix (2003) observe that school self evaluation has been on schools’ educational agenda in almost all European countries for the past two decades at least, and since 1975 in France and UK. MacGilchrist (2000), drawing on McBeath’s (1999) international study of the use of school evaluation as a school improvement strategy, notes that a common

theme emerges from the diverse experiences of different countries that have attempted to adapt the process to their own context and cultures: there is a 'desire to find the optimum balance between internal and external evaluation' (MacGilchrist, *ibid*: 328). The resulting tension between 'self-evaluation for development and self-evaluation for accountability purposes' (*ibid*: 327) is still to be resolved. She suggests that since self-improvement is multi-dimensional in nature, self-evaluation must happen at various levels in order to 'serve the dual purpose of development and accountability' (*ibid*: 330).

Criticisms of the school based review and evaluation strategy started to emerge by the mid-1980s with researchers such as Clift et al (1987: 200) pointing out that it did not necessarily bring about 'substantial and enduring changes in the schools' and neither had it proved to be cost effective. Hopkins and Reynolds (2001: 459) also note that emphasis was on organisational change and 'the practices struggled to impact upon classroom practice'. Meuret and Morlaix (2003: 54) add that it is no longer common practice in the majority of European schools, where they seem to prefer more 'trendy development plans' through which they can attract extra resources. However, MacBeath (2005) argues that essential factors for successful self-evaluation, such as a clear understanding of the purposes of the exercise by all concerned, enabling schools to develop their own 'home grown' approaches and mechanisms that would bring about the embedding of the process in schools, must also be present.

Development Planning

Development planning has become established as one of the key strategies for school improvement, in many education systems, over the past decade.

MacGilchrist et al (1995) describe it as a process that ‘is seen as a means whereby the planning for different aspects of the life and work of a school can be brought together in an integrated way’ (quoted in MacGilchrist 2000: 332). Hopkins and MacGilchrist (1998: 411) also refer to it as a process that represents ‘a generic problem solving cycle that has broad applicability’. It involves an internal audit or self-review – to enable the school to identify priority areas for improvement and to construct a development plan; the translation of priorities into targets and the development of an action plan for each target set. The implementation of the action plans is kept under regular review and the impact of the overall plan is evaluated at specific points after which the results are fed back into the next planning cycle.

While Hopkins and MacGilchrist (1998) consider that development planning has evolved from a tool for managing change at curriculum and management level into a means of enhancing pupil achievement in successful schools, MacGilchrist (2000: 332) concedes that ‘not all plans lead to improvement’. This was evident in research she and other colleagues carried out on the impact of development planning in primary schools in the London area and schools from other local education authorities all over UK. (MacGilchrist et al, 1995; MacGilchrist, 2000). The process was examined at three levels: the school as a whole, the professional development of teachers, and learning opportunities for pupils in the classroom. It was found that the type of plans that did have an impact at classroom level had the following characteristics:

- a shared sense of ownership and purpose
- shared leadership and management

- resource management and staff development
- a focus on teaching and learning and pupil achievement
- systematic monitoring and evaluation

(MacGilchrist, 2000: 332)

She therefore points to the need for schools to ‘stand back and evaluate the extent to which such plans and the processes involved achieve their aims and make a difference, particularly in the classroom’ (ibid: 332).

Hopkins and Levin (2000) also argue that, although policy makers maintain that development planning plays an important role in raising standards, the strategy has not yet reached its potential and has not had the expected impact on pupils’ achievements. Ouston (1999) questions the assumptions that school development planning is an appropriate strategy for school improvement. Considering that schools are not necessarily rational organisations, she agrees with Fullan (1993) that change efforts in schools must take into account their rapidly changing contexts. Fullan (ibid) maintains that, as a consequence, it is teachers themselves who have to become the change agents and to do this they need to develop a strong moral purpose.

Ball (1997: 329) points to the central paradox of development planning which may be viewed as ‘part of a complex web of tactics and procedures which tie the details of organisational life to the steering requirements of the state’ while symbolising a participative system of management which is open to the widespread expression of views and concerns.

Site-based or school-based management

Allocating more decision-making authority to schools is the basic tenet of site-based or school-based management (SBM). The strategy has been widely adopted by education systems in many parts of the world, especially those with more democratic political systems (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988; Leithwood and Menzies, 1998; Beck and Murphy, 1998). Thus in many states of the USA, in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the UK and several other European countries, SBM has become the norm. It was initiated for many different reasons, it takes a variety of forms but the common objective is to improve school quality (Robertson and Briggs, 1998).

According to David (1996: 5), SBM 'has almost as many variants as there are places claiming to be "site-based" '. In view of this diversity in the application of SBM principles, Leithwood and Menzies (1998) have specified three different forms of SBM, depending on 'where the locus of decision-making power lies' (ibid: 233). They propose that it may be with 'administrators, school professionals or members of the community served by the school' (ibid: 233), and consequently the form of SBM adopted could be characterised in terms of administrative control, professional control or community control.

Administrative control SBM involves giving local school administrators greater authority over areas such as the budget, personnel and the curriculum. Ultimately it aims to increase accountability to the central authorities for the areas of responsibility devolved to school administrators. Professional control SBM places decision-making authority in the hands of teachers in areas such as budget,

curriculum and, occasionally, personnel, through their greater proportional representation on school councils or boards. This approach is based on corporate management models, which suggest that increased workers' participation in decision-making will result in a greater level of workers' satisfaction (Holloway, 2000), although, as he points out, greater satisfaction does not imply greater productivity.

The community control form of SBM aims at increasing accountability to parents and the wider community, and generally at bringing about greater "consumer satisfaction" (Leithwood and Menzies, *ibid*: 234). Another form of community control involves giving parents a choice of schools, which can be interpreted as 'the most direct form of accountability by schools to the community' (*ibid*: 235).

Whatever the form of SBM adopted, Leithwood and Menzies (*ibid*: 235) maintain that 'evidence of (their) effects are far from compelling'. In particular there is little evidence to suggest that SBM has any direct or indirect effect on students' learning. This is also confirmed by Beck and Murphy (1998: 359) who concluded that it did not bring about the desired effects 'if we assume that its goal is to have a direct and positive impact on student learning outcomes'. Dellar (1995), and Nir (2002) came to similar conclusions in separate investigations of the impact of SBM in western Australian secondary schools and Israeli primary schools respectively. Leithwood and Menzies (*ibid*: 235) suggest that 'judgements about the value of SBM as a reform strategy depend largely on the more specific aspirations for its adoption'.

Organisational learning and capacity-building

While not denying the significance of improvement in management practices and in structural alterations, several scholars and practitioners advocate for the ‘development of people’ as the most important element in school improvement. (e.g. Fullan, 1993; Rowe 2004, Hargreaves 1994, Hattie 2003). Teachers are seen as the key agents of change, and therefore, the main argument for this approach is that if improvements are to happen in students’ achievements at the level of the classroom, the focus has to be on teachers’ beliefs and understandings, and on their behaviours and practices (Fullan, 1993; Imants, 2003; Rowe, 2004; Bezzina, 1999). Rowe (2004: 12) maintains that ‘it is what teachers know, do and care about which is very powerful in this learning equation’. Teacher learning and development therefore become crucial factors in the process of educational change, within a context of schools as learning organisations.

As suggested by Imants (2003: 300), it is ‘reasonable to assume that in one or another form organisational learning occurs in every school’, but as he also concedes, the concept ‘remains rather unclear’. Lumby (1997: 33) too notes that ‘there is no common understanding of just what the term means.’ She sees a paradox in this difficulty of definition: ‘Individuals learn, but the sum of that learning does not necessarily equal organisational learning’ (ibid: 33), which echoes Senge’s (1990) observation that although individuals learn all the time this does not amount to organisational learning.

Nevertheless various definitions have been proposed. According to Senge (1990: 3), organisational learning happens when:

people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, when new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.

Alternatively, Bryk et al (1999: 298) define organisational learning as ‘a general orientation of school staff towards experimentation and innovation’. Louis and Leithwood (1998: 298) distinguish between three levels in their definition of organisational learning in schools:

- (1) individual learning by teachers or school leaders within the context of the school
- (2) learning in small groups or teams of teachers
- (3) learning that occurs across the school organisation as a whole.

Lumby (ibid) however, considers ‘a communal focus for learning’ as an important condition for organisational learning. This corresponds to some extent with Southworth’s (2002: 88) description of schools as learning organisations. He explains that such schools are ‘relatively advanced institutions’ having developed collaborative teacher cultures where:

formal and informal professional dialogue is the norm and which includes challenge, debate and a willingness among all staff to address their professional differences in a calm and mature manner.

According to Lam and Punch (2001: 28), the concept remains problematic at various levels: ‘(it) is not completely understood nor commonly agreed upon, not to mention problems with its operational definition and empirical assessment’. However, Lumby (ibid: 39) suggests that such a concept cannot ‘offer a single practical agenda’ but it is rather ‘an overarching concept’ that has the potential to fully integrate teaching and learning among staff and students. She further posits

that for schools to become learning organisations it would be necessary to enquire into the nature of learning, to get people in the school to learn how to learn, to involve all staff in the learning process, to ensure information flow in all directions and for the school leader to demonstrate commitment to collaborative learning throughout.

Professional learning communities

Closely associated with concepts of organisational learning are the notions of professional learning communities (Hord, 1997) and teacher leadership (Frost and Durrant, 2003). To a large extent these concepts form the basis of opportunities for acknowledging, supporting and valuing the significant intellectual, emotional, social and political work that teachers do daily (Lovett and Gilmore, 2003). However, they are equally fraught with variations in conceptualisation and interpretation, and these are often dependent on a number of factors including context specificity and culture. However, as Southworth (2002: 74) pointed out with respect to leadership, it is ‘socially constructed’ and as such ‘it will vary from setting to setting. Therefore, instead of searching for an over-arching theory we may need a more pluralistic approach to take account of the inherently variegated nature of leadership’. This could no doubt apply equally to the notions of professional learning communities and teacher leadership.

Huffman and Jacobson (2003: 240), basing their definition on that of Brown and Isaacs (1994), consider professional learning community as ‘a school organisation in which all stakeholders are involved in joint planning, action, and assessment for student growth and school improvement’. Hord (1997: 240) defines it as ‘the

professional staff studying and acting together to direct efforts toward improved student learning'. While one definition is aimed at the level of the school the other seems to target mainly the professional staff, confirming Louis and Marks' (1998: 534) comment about what they have termed 'the locus of community' – how and where professional community might best be achieved. Imants (2003) suggests that there is a need to differentiate between the concepts of professional learning communities and communities of practice, the former being more formal and comprising teams and other such units, while the latter involves a rather informal and fluid process of collaboration. Again, considering the context specificity and the nature of schools, variations in application are bound to exist.

The literature also suggests it is imperative that high levels of external and school-based support are forthcoming and are built into schools' organisational capacity. Time and financial resources are also very important. Lovett and Gilmore (2003: 207) through a study of Quality Learning Circles in New Zealand, point to five principles that underpin effective teacher learning and development, namely: 'school cultures that value learning; opportunities for learning with others; collegial relationships; learning networks and approaches, and (making sense of) teachers' experiences'.

Teacher Leadership

Similar principles may apply to the concept of teacher leadership which, according to Frost and Durrant (2003: 179), draws upon the traditions of the 'teacher-as-researcher' and 'action research' along with the more recent developments related to 'evidence-based practice', but it brings out the 'strategic

dimension' which had been lacking. They consider teacher leadership to be mainly concerned with 'teachers' agency and choice in initiating and sustaining change whatever their status' (ibid: 174). Anderson (2004: 100) elaborates further thus: 'to set directions and influence others to move in those directions. It is a fluid, interactive process with mutual influence between leader and follower'. Like Frost and Harris (2003), he explains that it may be exercised formally through position or designation, as well as informally through a wish to innovate and change. This links up with the notion of the development of communities of practice (Imants, ibid) discussed above. Harris and Muijs (2002: 9), in their review of teacher leadership literature, propose that:

Empowering teachers in this way and providing them with opportunities to lead is based on the simple but profound idea that if schools are to become better at providing learning for students then they must also become better at providing opportunities for teachers to innovate, develop and learn together.

The question of the impact of teacher learning on the classroom is raised by Imants (ibid), who observes that systematic reflection on classroom practices and genuine collaboration are important factors in organisational learning. Otherwise 'the main focus of teacher learning is on refinement of existing routines' (ibid: 304) while feeling they are performing well enough. Burchell et al (2002: 219 - 220) however, propose that since 'teachers themselves expect that CPD will make a difference in the classroom', self-reported improvement 'is an important indicator of impact'. Considering the challenges of transforming teachers' thinking and practices at classroom level alluded to by Joyce et al (1989) and Nir (2002), the validity of self reported improvement remains questionable (Glover and Law, 1996).

The literature also highlights the mutual influences of teacher leaders and principals, the quality and type of school leadership being an essential ingredient in the successful development of professional learning communities and teacher leadership (Huffman and Jacobson, 2003; Frost and Harris, 2003).

Significance of school leadership

Effective leadership is widely acknowledged as being a key component in the achievement of school improvement. Harris (2002: 15) notes that ‘research findings from diverse countries and different school contexts have revealed the powerful impact of leadership in securing school development and change’. However, it is also accepted in the literature that effective leadership approaches in education may be as diverse as there are schools (Harris, *ibid*). Consequently it becomes difficult to provide precise definitions of education leadership, but Fidler (1997: 25) identifies two key features:

- a sense of purpose and confidence is engendered in followers;
- followers are influenced towards goal achievement.

He goes on to observe that what may be considered as appropriate leadership at any particular point in time depends on a number of factors: ‘the context and its pre-history; the nature of the followers; the particular issues involved; in addition to the predispositions of the leader’ (*ibid*: 25). Thus leadership styles may need to be varied in order to suit the prevailing circumstances.

Bush (2003), while also acknowledging that there is no agreed definition of the concept of educational leadership, suggests that three main elements may be identified: the application of influence over others; the communication of strong

personal and professional values and building a common vision for the school. Additionally, Bush (2003) and Bush and Middlewood (2005) point to the debate over the concepts of leadership and management, which are sometimes considered as competing elements.

Lawlor and Sills (1999: 53) for instance contrast the concepts of management and leadership, proposing that management is about ‘ensuring that tasks are completed through effective planning, organisation, supervision and the deployment of human and other resources’ while leadership involves

developing and sustaining a shared vision and set of values in an organisation, providing clear direction and most crucially motivating others and releasing their energies, commitment, ideas and skills’.

The need for a balance between management and leadership roles in the improvement of schools is brought out by several scholars (e.g. Bolman and Deal, 1997; Dimmock, 1999; Bush, 2003; Bush and Glover, 2003; Bush and Middlewood, 2005).

According to Harris (2005: 3), what exactly constitutes ‘the complex relationship between school leadership and school improvement’ is still not much understood. She cites the ‘weak empirical base’ (ibid) and a focus of research on the characteristics of leadership as the main reasons for this. Similarly, Simkins (2005: 10) argues that as well as identifying ‘what works’ it is equally important to consider ‘making sense of things’ in the leadership world.

Models of Leadership

As indicated by Bush and Glover (2003), leadership models abound in the literature, but they also note that none of them provide ‘a complete picture of school leadership’ (ibid: 21). Rather than engaging in a discussion of the different leadership models – which goes beyond the scope of this review – it is judged more expedient to contrast, using Simkins (2005:12) descriptions, the traditional and emerging views of leadership:

The traditional view	An emerging view
Leadership resides in individuals	Leadership is the property of social systems
Leadership is hierarchically based and linked to office	Leadership can occur anywhere
Leadership occurs when leaders do things to followers	Leadership is a complex process of mutual influence
Leadership is different from and more important than management	The leadership/management distinction is unhelpful
Leaders are different	Anyone can be a leader
Leaders make a crucial difference to organizational performance	Leadership is one of many factors that may influence organizational performance
Effective leadership is generalisable	The context of leadership is crucial

Table 2. 1: An emerging view of leadership

(Source: Simkins, 2005: 12)

It could be argued that the emerging views of leadership match more closely models such as distributed (Harris, 2004) and instructional (Southworth, 2002) leadership, which tend to be associated with school improvement initiatives. Bush and Glover (ibid: 29) observe however, that a number of ‘contextual factors which are likely to be significant in influencing approaches to leadership in schools’ must also be taken into account. These include the size and type of school; its location and governance; socio-economic factors, the parent body,

staffing, school culture and the degree of power and control that educational institutions have on their internal management and functions (Bush, 2003).

Visioning

The quality of school leadership and its capacity to establish ‘a shared vision and a shared set of aims for the school’ (Hopkins and MacGilchrist, 1998: 421) are considered essential characteristics of successful school improvement. However, as Bush and Middlewood (ibid: 10) point out, ‘the process of vision development’ has been given limited attention in the literature. They argue ‘that people are more likely to understand, and to seek to implement, the vision if they have been involved in its development’ (ibid). The capacity of school leaders to fully involve others in this process is considered by Begley (1994), through a framework that attempts to match leadership types with vision capacities. His categories of ‘Manager, Instructional leader, School community facilitator, Visionary and Problem solver suggest the range of possible leadership types, and within those a four-level analysis of each category indicates the breadth of possibilities – from ‘basic’ to ‘expert’. In the category of school leader as visionary he suggests:

Basic: Possesses a set of goals derived from Ministry and Board expectations.

Intermediate: Develops school goals consistent with the principal’s articulated vision.

Advanced: Works with the teaching staff to develop school goals which reflect their collaborative vision.

Expert: Collaborates with representative members of the school community to develop goals which reflect a collaboratively developed vision statement.

(Adapted from Begley, 1994).

The effects of contextual and cultural factors (mentioned in the sub-section above) are also significant in the development of visionary leadership. Bush and

Middlewood (ibid: 5), in their discussion of centralised and bureaucratic education systems, note that school leaders in such systems

...experience particular problems in developing a distinctive vision for their schools. When heads and principals are reduced to implementing directives from national, regional or local government, they lack the scope to articulate school goals. They also cannot lead and manage staff effectively because all the major decisions about staff appointments, promotions and development are made by government officials. This approach is evident in China ... the largest educational system in the world, and also in the Seychelles, one of the smallest.

It can be argued that the small size of the bureaucratic systems of SIDS and people's personalised work relationships (Bray, 1991) may attenuate, to some extent, the level of control exercised, but the issue remains relevant to education systems such as that of the Seychelles, which tend to import policies and practices from other systems as a matter of expediency (Bray, 1991).

The relevance of context

There is general agreement among researchers and practitioners alike that successful school improvement is context specific (Hopkins et al, 1994; Harris 2001). In view of the fact that no two schools are alike, it is expected that adaptations of models and policies have to be made, but as Dimmock and Walker (2000: 144) argue with reference to educational leadership and management, 'it shows every tendency to continue its narrow ethnocentric focus' in spite of internationalising trends. Many countries – especially developing ones – often face the dilemmas 'associated with the uncritical international transfer of educational policy and practice' (Crossley, 2000: 320). Fertig (2000: 395), noting the wholesale adoption by developing countries of school effectiveness and school improvement models from the more developed ones, advocates:

a more contextual model, one which takes account of the internal processes within the school, the socio-economic, political and cultural contexts in which the

organisation operates, and the perspectives which different stakeholder groups bring to bear on the activities of the school.

Dimmock and Walker (2000: 144) propose the development of ‘a more robust conceptual, methodological and analytical approach to comparative and international educational management’, a concept which could apply to other aspects of education development. They go on to elaborate a conceptual framework based on two levels of culture – societal and organizational – which could handle comparative aspects of educational leadership and management in a more balanced way. The question of balance is also alluded to by Crossley and Holmes, 2000: 396) who observe that

growing tensions between powerful ‘localising’ and ‘globalising’ forces increasingly mean that local issues cannot be understood without reference to the local context. Conversely, global problems cannot be realistically considered without an understanding of local priorities and agendas.

They therefore suggest that, particularly in the case of small developing states, ‘a comprehensive understanding of both the local and the global is needed’ if they are ‘to engage productively with powerful international agendas in order to formulate and articulate their own priorities in education’ (ibid: 396). Others, such as Bray (1993), have pointed to the pervasiveness of colonial legacies in education. Louisy (2001: 427) calls for ‘greater cross-cultural sensitivity’ in educational development while acknowledging the need to ‘foster people’s awareness of the interdependent community in which we now live’. She goes on to advocate a ‘concept of differentiation in a globalised context’ while acknowledging that ‘globalising trends and the proximity of larger societies add to pressures for adapting to external influences.’

Policy borrowing in education (Phillips and Ochs, 2003: 451) is a process of long standing that has been used in many systems to bring about educational change. In so doing, a wide range of factors come into play, such as the potential of the policy or strategy to be ‘transplanted’, its implementation, the process involved in the ‘indigenisation’ of the policy and the significance of context (ibid). The authors readily acknowledge the difficulty of studying such factors, especially those related to context as they vary so widely. At the same time, however, consideration of contextual factors is vital for the success or otherwise of an innovation. As Hopkins et al (1994:79) argue with regard to various school improvement programmes:

Some form of evaluation, review or needs assessment should precede selection of the innovation. These decisions need to be made rationally on the basis of evidence. In these cases and in our own experience, this preliminary process is often neglected. A connected point is that, in virtually all these cases, the innovation was chosen with little regard to local conditions.

While acknowledging the importance of context and cultural differences in policy and model borrowings, Gronn and Ribbins (2003: 87) go further, arguing that the greater significance is in ‘what they may be taken to mean.’ Pointing to the fact that ‘the cultures of most societies are hybrid in character rather than, as it were, immaculate conceptions’, the authors propose that different cultural values and models ‘are not significant for the fact that they diffuse, but rather for the manner of their diffusion’ (ibid: 88). Thus it could be argued that with a very limited research base and appropriate human resources, it is expedient for a small state like Seychelles to take advantage of the benefits of innovations that have been tried out elsewhere and then to ‘capitalise on implementation’ (ibid: 89). The authors suggest that, whatever the form of adoption and adaptation, some form of ‘hybridisation’ inevitably takes place. There is always a ‘re-translation and

fleshing out of the culturally informed particulars and niceties of those broad arrangements' (ibid: 91) by the host culture.

The importance of context and the potential for diversity in the application of school improvement concepts are further illustrated by the school improvement projects and programmes discussed in the next section of this literature review.

Impact of School Improvement Concepts on Projects and Programmes

This section gives an overview of three school improvement projects selected from the ones mentioned earlier in this chapter. It aims to show the impact of school improvement concepts and models on specific projects and programmes and to illustrate the extent and diversity of school improvement initiatives, as the process developed over time. The three projects have been chosen because of their international dimensions and their contribution to the wider dissemination of research findings, which have informed school improvement programmes in the small island states to be discussed in the next section of this review. They are the International School Improvement Project (Hopkins, 1987 and 1990), the Improving the Quality of Education for All project (Hopkins and Ainscow, 1993; Harris and Young, 2000, and Harris, 2000) and the Commonwealth Secretariat's Teacher Management and Support programme (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1992 and 1993).

The International School Improvement Project (ISIP)

The ISIP was a multi-national, decentralised project sponsored by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) through its Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), from 1982 to 1986. It brought together one hundred and fifty people from fourteen mainly European countries, who worked in different groups, in different locations on six specific areas that represented the major aspects of school improvement (Hopkins, 1990).

The areas were:

- school-based review
- the role of school leaders
- external support
- research and evaluation
- school improvement policy development and implementation
- and the conceptual mapping of school improvement.

Each area was dealt with by a working group, which had an international membership, and the groups' main concern was, according to Hopkins (1990: 180), 'to examine current provision and to develop strategies for school improvement policy and practice.' The groups, consisting of researchers, policy makers, practitioners and members of support systems, met regularly, shared their findings and experiences, and kept in contact through a newsletter. Typically, group members prepared and read papers, visited schools and provided support to education organisations and ministries; they offered mutual assistance and consultation and sometimes paired up with other groups to work on shared projects.

Hopkins (ibid) notes that the ISIP took an approach to school improvement which rested on a number of assumptions, namely that:

- the school was considered as the centre of change
- school improvement was seen as a systematic approach to change
- the school's 'internal conditions' was a key focus of planned change
- school improvement helps to accomplish educational goals more effectively
- it has a multi-level perspective, adopts integrative implementation strategies and aims to institutionalise successful innovations.

The outcomes of the work of the different groups were wide-ranging and in some areas they laid the foundations for the further development of school improvement (Hopkins, 1990). Below is a brief overview of the major aspects of the work of four of the groups, chosen because the outcomes of their work relate most directly to the school improvement efforts being investigated through this study.

The working group dealing with *school-based review* developed and adapted materials from McMahon et al's (1984) *Guides for Review and Internal Developments in Schools*, (cited in Hopkins, 1990) to establish procedures for school review. In Hopkins' view the materials not only provided guidelines for review but also led to a systematic school improvement process involving review, planning and development. It was also possible, he maintains, to adapt the process to different contexts. The further evolution of the process of school-based review has already been discussed in an earlier section (see page 37).

The second area, which dealt with *the role of school leaders*, gave rise to a number of case studies highlighting the importance of the head in the change and

development processes, as well as the need for good preparation for leadership and the personal attributes and qualities that contribute to effective leadership (Hopkins, 1990).

The working group for the third area – *external support* – found that they were venturing onto new ground, realising a need to more adequately conceptualise external support (Hopkins, 1990). In the context of school improvement, there was a need to acknowledge the contribution of various agencies and to redefine their roles, with emphasis on the collaborative nature of such support. It was also necessary for schools to redefine their needs more clearly and to become more proactive in making use of external support.

The work relating to the fourth area, *policy development and implementation*, pointed to the need for a changed perspective in this area (Hopkins, 1990). Teachers and schools having a tendency to be suspicious of policy generally, it was considered important for education practitioners to be aware of the utility of policy and to know how to formulate policy that would be useful at the local level. Schools and educational practitioners also needed to acknowledge that school improvement was a process happening over a long period of time rather than an event that took place as a result of policy announcements.

While there is general agreement that the ISIP, in the words of Reynolds et al (1993: 42), ‘served to popularise a revised school improvement approach’, it is also acknowledged that it had limited impact on classroom practice (Hopkins et al, 1993, Gray et al, 1999. Hopkins and Jackson, 2002). Reynolds et al (2001: 1)

consider that many of the initiatives associated with the ISIP were ‘free floating’ and did not represent a ‘systematic, programmatic and coherent approach to school change’. The emphasis then was on ‘organisational change, school self-evaluation and the “ownership of change” by individual schools and teachers’. Hopkins (2001) also concedes that the ISIP initiatives were variable and fragmented, and were only loosely connected to students’ learning outcomes.

With hindsight, Hopkins and Jackson (2002: 2) argue that the ISIP provided a major impetus to ‘the development of school improvement as a strategic response to the challenge of educational change’. They argue that the project took a more holistic and systemic view of educational change compared to other school improvement initiatives at the time, regarding schools as the centre of change and therefore requiring strategies that focused on ‘expanding the capacity of the school to take control of its own development’ (ibid: 2). However, the authors also note that there is a need for greater clarity about how its component parts might come together in practice – the ‘how’ as opposed to the ‘what’ of school improvement. They believe that the answer lies in exploring the concept of ‘capacity’ which they define as ‘the internal organisational characteristics of the school’ (ibid: 2).

The Improving the Quality of Education for All Project (IQEA)

Issues of building capacity for improvement are central to the IQEA project which, according to Hopkins et al (1997: 402), ‘has demonstrated that without a strong focus on the internal conditions of the school, innovative work quickly becomes marginalised’. They define these ‘conditions’ as ‘the internal features of

the school, the “arrangements” that enable it to get work done’ (ibid). A number of such conditions are associated with the school’s capacity for sustained improvement and underlie their working definition of the school’s ‘development capacity’. They argue that the project has provided sufficient evidence to show that the following conditions form the basis of ‘at least one developed approach to the school’s capacity for development’ (ibid):

- a commitment to staff development ;
- practical efforts to involve staff, students and the community in school policies and decisions;
- ‘transformational’ leadership approaches;
- effective co-ordination strategies;
- proper attention to the potential benefits of enquiry and reflection;
- a commitment to collaborative planning activity.

(Hopkins et al: 1997: 402).

According to Reynolds et al (1993: 46), the key findings of research undertaken in relation to the project indicate ‘that school improvement works best when a clear and practical focus for development is linked to simultaneous work on the internal conditions within the school’. Thus schools are encouraged to work both on the classroom level and school level conditions simultaneously (Ainscow et al, 1994).

The IQEA is considered to be one of the successful projects of what has been termed the third phase of school improvement (Reynolds et al, 2001; Hopkins, 2001), drawing from the lessons of earlier school improvement initiatives such as the ISIP and from the research base resulting from the rapprochement of the school effectiveness and school improvement fields (Harris and Young, 2000). It developed during a period of widespread policy changes in UK schools which, according to Harris and Young (2000), encouraged a ‘top-down’ approach to school improvement focusing mainly on structural changes at school level. The

IQEA 'is the antithesis to this approach. The IQEA model is premised upon the relationship between teacher and school development' (ibid: 32). Its goal is to enhance learning outcomes for both students and teachers (Hopkins and Ainscow, 1993). The project is guided by a set of principles which, in the view of Harris and Hopkins (2000: 10), represent participants' expectations of the way project schools pursue school improvement:

- School improvement is a process that focuses on enhancing the quality of students' learning.
- The vision of the school should be one that embraces all members of the school community as both learners and contributors.
- The school will secure its internal priorities through adopting external pressures for change and in so doing enhance its capacity for managing change.
- The school will seek to use data and action research to drive forward and inform with school improvement efforts.
- The school will seek to develop structures and create conditions that encourage collaboration and lead to the empowerment of students and teachers.

School improvement is thus seen as a process to facilitate cultural change within schools, as well as a means of improving students' learning (Beresford et al. 2003).

Since its inception in 1991 the project has operated in over eighty schools (Reynolds et al, 2001), and it has now taken on an international dimension with the involvement of schools in Iceland, Puerto Rico and South Africa (Harris, 2000). Schools join the project on a voluntary basis through a process of application guided by certain conditions. A 'cadre group' which is responsible for leading the change process, must also be recruited (Harris, 2000). The university for its part, provides a link adviser and a programme of staff development activities for each school. The link adviser supports and promotes the change process within the school through the organisation of training, consultancies and group facilitation (Harris, 2000).

Harris and Hopkins (2000: 10) posit that the IQEA ‘provides an over-arching model for school improvement’ which schools can then adapt for their own purposes and fit to their own circumstances and needs. It does not define what schools do but defines the parameters for development. They also maintain that the model is research driven, encouraging schools to carry out rigorous internal evaluations, to constantly engage in enquiry and to make use of the existing external research base related to teaching and learning. As a result the project has brought together considerable empirical evidence concerning the dynamic processes of change at classroom and school levels, and it has done so from different perspectives. They believe that all of this has enriched current policies and practices worldwide.

Beresford et al (2003: 208) believe that the ‘cadre groups’, referred to as the school improvement groups (SIG), are the ‘engine of school improvement in their schools’ and as such are a critical element in the IQEA:

The effectiveness or otherwise of the SIGs’ work has been critical in the extent to which involvement in the various IQEA projects has brought about improvements in student learning.

In their review of research and practice about ‘what works’ to improve schools, Reynolds et al (2001: 12) concluded that the project schools had no evidence of ‘differential pupil score gain’ but they went on to explain that this had not been the aim of the project and therefore there had been no baseline data on cohort groups nor control groups. The focus is on establishing conditions for

improvement and the project claims that this is being achieved on a differentiated scale depending on the stage of development of the individual school.

Teacher Management and Support Project

Following the 1990 Jomtien education conference on 'Education for All', there was a move worldwide to focus on improving the quality of education as well as the provision of education for all. The Commonwealth Secretariat, through its Education Programme, had been involved since 1988 in helping to mobilise national and international resources to improve management in African education systems and in schools (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1993). It brought together 'a loose consortium of international agencies and representatives of African ministries of education' (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1992: 1) known as the Donors to African Education (DAE), with a view to providing 'a multilateral framework for bilateral co-operation' (ibid). The DAE identified a number of areas for development; nine working groups, comprising DAE representatives (including British researchers in school improvement) and African education professionals, were set up to develop action plans dealing with the different areas. One of the working groups took the lead in establishing initiatives related to the teaching profession, aiming to bring about improvements in teacher morale and motivation, along with the professionalisation of and support to teachers.

In a first colloquium, held in Dar es Salaam in October 1993, the working group decided to focus on the concept of Teacher Management and Support (TMS) as a means of achieving its stated aims. Participating ministries of education were required to set up country working groups nationally to develop action plans in

order to prioritise actions related to teacher management and professional support in sub-Saharan African countries (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1992).

It was through the TMS programme that the Seychelles School Improvement Programme was born, with the setting up of a Country Working Group in 1993 which put together a country action plan focusing on school based development (SIP Secretariat, 2000). The literature related to the development of this programme is discussed in the final section of this chapter.

The teaching profession working group identified a number of concerns related to teacher management and support in African countries, namely a tendency towards over-centralisation of education policy and procedures, the legal status of teachers, strategies for managing and developing teachers at national and local levels and gender equity amongst teachers and students (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1995). Several of these issues were addressed in country action plans, which, through the advocacy of the teaching profession working group, were to be integrated within the framework of national education reforms (ibid). At the same time the TMS programme undertook a number of facilitation activities which were more broadly based than the country action plans, and to a certain extent provided support to the latter (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1995). These included:

- a needs assessment survey and proposed activities related to gender issues in five countries;
- a series of case studies carried out in four countries and entitled ‘the Function and Performance of Teacher Management Structures’ and a study of the ‘Legal Framework for Teacher Management’ involving three countries, were commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat in 1994;

- various publications produced as part of the ‘Better Education Management’ series which were made available to all participating countries;
- the production, dissemination and implementation of seven training modules designed to improve the managerial and professional skills of headteachers and other school managers, and involving seven African education ministries.
- The working group on female participation led to the creation of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE).

(Adapted from Commonwealth Secretariat, 1995)

While these initiatives contributed substantially to education development projects in several African countries, the country working groups tended to be seen as separate advisory groups and their proposed projects often remained peripheral to the main national education reform agendas (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1995). The TMS programme advocated the integration of country projects into the frameworks of national reforms so that they would attract more funding and have greater impact on the system. In 1995 this occurred in the case of Botswana, Seychelles, Zimbabwe and Senegal (ibid) but there appears to be no indication from the existing literature as to the factors operating in these countries which brought this about.

However, certain weaknesses remained, in particular related to what was termed ‘frontline support’ through an African organisation or institution to facilitate the implementation of the country action plans, to assist ministries of education in obtaining appropriate funding for projects, to support research and to provide a focal point for policy analysis (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1995). This need has been partly filled by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), which evolved from the DAE in the later part of the 1990s. The main aim of the ADEA is to develop partnerships between ministers of education and

funding agencies in order to promote effective education policies based on African leadership and ownership (ADEA, 2003). It is led by a steering committee composed of ten African education ministers and representatives of funding agencies. The ADEA also co-ordinates the work of ten working groups which ‘undertake exploratory work and examine ways to improve performance in their specific domain. Although the working groups are all structured and managed in different ways they all carry out research, capacity building, advocacy and networking activities’ (ADEA, 2003: 2).

Teacher Management and Support remain the main focus of the working group dealing with the teaching profession although it has now broadened the scope of its programme to Teacher Education and Management Support (TEMS), taking into consideration development and support to initial teacher training as well. Consequently the working group is having to reconsider its priorities in relation to the Education For All (EFA) plans, the Millenium Development Goals, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in education, decentralisation policies and HIV/AIDS. Its activities are centred around advocacy, research, networking and professional exchange, capacity building and facilitating access to information and knowledge (ADEA, 2007). The Working Group on the Teaching Profession is led by the Commonwealth Secretariat and its activities promoting networking and professional exchange, among others, have given rise to various synergies with other Commonwealth Secretariat projects.

School Improvement in Small Island Developing States

One such programme involves the enhancement of School Improvement Programmes in Small States (SIPSS). The Commonwealth Secretariat's SIPSS programme was a recommendation of a 'meeting of education experts from Commonwealth small states' in Seychelles in September 2000, to Commonwealth education ministers in their Halifax 2000 meeting (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2000). Consequently the Secretariat organised and supported a number of activities promoting SIPSS, aiming to ascertain the extent of school improvement in small states of the Commonwealth, 'to share best practices in School Improvement Programmes and to introduce evaluation as a vital tool in assessing the impact of School Improvement initiatives' (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003: 6). Some of the main activities undertaken involved a 'School Improvement Programmes exchange' between Seychelles and Namibia through a study visit to Seychelles by senior Namibian educators in 2001; a survey of school improvement interventions in small states, and the organisation of a pan-Commonwealth conference on "School Evaluation Best Practices in Small States" in Malta, in April 2003.

According to the Secretariat's progress report on achievements since the Halifax meeting (Commonwealth Secretariat, (2003a: 6), their survey of small states' school improvement interventions showed a wide range of initiatives being pursued but they noted in particular 'the lack of evaluation strategies to measure the progress of these initiatives and to assess their impact and effect.' "Issues and concerns in evaluating school improvement in small states" was one of the main themes of the April 2003 Malta Conference, which identified aspects of

leadership capacity, school based curriculum development, formative assessment, teacher empowerment through ongoing professional development, and initial teacher training as the major areas of concern (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003b).

Some of these issues are considered in the sub-sections below, focused on school improvement initiatives in three SIDS, namely Trinidad and Tobago, Malta and the Maldives. These islands are all members of the Commonwealth, with British colonial pasts that have determined to various degrees the development of their education systems (Bray,1993). Like the Seychelles SIP, the three programmes were initiated during the same decade (the 1990s) and, especially for Malta and Trinidad and Tobago, they were inspired by the school improvement impetus of the time, in the western hemisphere. The school improvement programme of each island state is presented briefly followed by a thematic discussion of the common issues that are most salient to the Seychelles SIP. A brief discussion of the concept of SIDS precedes the presentation.

SIDS – the concept

SIDS, as a special category of countries, have been the subject of much debate over many years but there is still little agreement as to the definition of ‘small’ and the means by which size is to be measured (Smawfield, 1993; Crowards, 2002; Armstrong and Read, 2003). One proposal is that the most relevant measurement variables should include population size, GDP or GNP, geographic area, the terms of trade and combinations of two or more such variables (Armstrong and Read, *ibid*). Crowards (*ibid*: 173) favours a more ‘practical methodology’ which combines population size, land area and income parameters;

he considers the more commonly used method of population size only (Briguglio, 1995; Commonwealth Secretariat / World Bank, 2000) as ‘an arbitrary selection of cut-off lines’. Armstrong and Read (ibid) maintain that such composite measures provide little additional information, and in any case, generally correlate strongly with a simple measure of population. There is some debate, however, on the issue of population size as well. Armstrong and Read (2003) propose a threshold of three million but the Commonwealth and most of its members have settled for 1.5 million, whereas the United Nations has decided on one million.

It has also been argued that the SIDS concept is a political construct (Ballantyne, 1998) that serves to advance the cause of small states. Gronn and Ribbins (2003: 77) seem inclined towards this view, considering the issue to be one of cultural values rather than size: ‘the argument is really about the place and significance of cultural values and whether, when, under what circumstances and why, culture might be shown to matter’.

Hindmarsh (1996: 37) takes a different perspective, suggesting that there should be a ‘range of alternative conceptualisations of small states and islands’. She notes that those most commonly held concepts are ‘closely linked with issues of colonisation, decolonisation and neo-colonialism’ (ibid: 42) and they stem from a positivist assumptions that the concepts and models of western social scientists are part of a social reality rather than a social construct. Thus vulnerability and viability are defined in terms of ‘the definers’ reality:

The specific indicators of such viability most commonly used are the extent to which the size and cosmopolitanism of the population, the type of economy, political systems, education systems and so on are equivalent to the (ex) colonial and super powers.

Hindmarsh advocates for a critical approach to the conceptualisation of small states and islands, one that allows the ‘defined to become the definers’ (ibid: 41), and shifts the focus from ‘economic viability’ to ‘that of maintenance of cultural authenticity, self-determination and identity, chieftainship and sovereignty’ (ibid: 43).

While strongly acknowledging the merits of the above arguments, for the purposes of this review, small island developing states (SIDS) are considered as a sub-group of small states, characterised by smallness of size (population of 1.5 million or less), environmental fragility, economic vulnerability and in many instances geographical isolation (Briguglio, 1995; University of the West Indies Centre for Environment and Development, 2002).

School improvement in Trinidad and Tobago, Malta and the Maldives

The school improvement programme of Trinidad and Tobago comprised a series of reforms started in 1995, as a result of research commissioned by the country’s National Task Force on Education (NTFE). Two major projects came out of the work of the NTFE: the Basic Education Project and the Secondary Education Modernisation Project (Newton, 2000). At school level the main thrusts of these reforms, according to George et al (2003: 192), were the replacement of ‘the traditional Common entrance examination (CEE) ...by a Continuous Assessment Programme (CAP) and a terminal Secondary Assessment programme (SEA)’; a move towards decentralisation of school administration, with special emphasis on school development planning and school based management (SBM). Training of school management staff in the implementation of these processes and the

continuous professional development of teachers were other important elements of the reform.

Malta's school improvement initiatives resulted from a shift in educational philosophy in the 1990s and 2000 which brought about major reforms. They included the development of a local school leaving certificate, the introduction of a National Minimum Curriculum and a move towards the decentralisation of school management (Sultana, 1999; Bezzina, 2002a). These school improvement initiatives are still in the process of implementation and they have set in motion further changes and synergies throughout the education system (Sultana, 1999). Among these are an increasing emphasis on the professional development of teachers, school based management and development planning, and a greater involvement of schools in the process of curriculum planning and implementation.

School improvement in the Maldives illustrates the diversity of interpretations of the term, as well as the importance of adapting school improvement models to context. The nature of the country makes conventional schooling arrangements difficult because of small and dispersed populations, resulting in diseconomies of scale (Shareef and Kinshuk, 2003). The islands suffer from a 'general shortage of skills in all sectors of the economy and government' (Ghina, 2003: 149). Consequently in the early 1990s, distance education, initially using radio and later IT facilities in regional learning centres, was seen as the most effective solution to the problems of educational access in a country made up of a large number of islands dispersed over 90,000km² of the Indian Ocean. In this instance the

concept of school improvement was viewed from a more fundamental perspective, linked to the development of the most viable strategies for the provision of secondary and further education nationally.

The school improvement initiatives of the three island states share a number of common features while at the same time exhibiting the diversity that seems to be inherent in the school improvement process. In all three countries the reforms were centrally led by policy makers at Ministry of Education level (George et al, 2003; Sultana, 1999 and Ghina, 2003). The vital role of teachers in school improvement was acknowledged although not always acted upon (George et al, *ibid*; Bezzina, 2002a, and Meacham and Zubair, 1992). The implementation of revised curricula considered to be better adapted to the local contexts also form part of each country's initiative. Development planning and school based management are crucial aspects of the school improvement processes of both Malta and Trinidad and Tobago, as are leadership training and development. Adaptations to the SIDS context are specific to each island state but their British colonial legacies remain a strong feature of their education systems and associated reforms (Bray, 1993).

Centrally led reforms

Disparities between the perceptions of policy makers and teachers are apparent in all three cases. In Trinidad and Tobago, George et al (2003: 204) point to the differences in the 'contextual realities' of teachers and the aspirations of policy makers with regard to the philosophy and purposes of the 1995 reforms:

These reforms ...require that teachers also look outwards, thinking of schools as rooted in the community. This is especially true in relation to decentralisation and SBM initiatives.

The authors' study of in-service teacher trainees' perceptions of 'their core beliefs and images of teaching' (ibid: 192) revealed that these were still rooted in the 'cultural myth that *teaching is a vocation*' (ibid: 2002: 204). They see this as cause for concern and suggest that policy makers take into account 'the characteristics of stakeholders more carefully in the policy formulation stages' (ibid).

Similar issues are raised by Bezzina (2002a: 65) with regard to 'policies that encourage school-based development to take place'. He observes that they seemed to imply the importance of the appropriate 'climate for turning our schools into sites of professional enquiry and reflective practice ...but the underlying feeling one gets is that the authorities may be assuming that it can just happen!' (Bezzina, ibid). He argues that reformers should take into consideration the underlying realities of teachers and schools in the implementation of reforms, what O'Sullivan (2002: 233) has termed 'classroots reality' factors, in her study of English language reforms in Namibia. By this she means 'the realities within which the teachers worked' (ibid: 220).

In the Maldives, Meacham and Zubair (1992: 6) warned against 'distance education which rely on unsustainable levels of technology' and suggested that the most appropriate question to be critically examined in the process is 'fitness for purpose'.

Teachers' involvement in school improvement

Bezzina and Camilleri (2001: 159) assert that 'the teacher is the ultimate key to educational change and school improvement.' They do not 'merely deliver the curriculum: they develop it, define it and reinterpret it too.' Therefore, what they think, what they believe and what they do profoundly shape the learning experiences of children and young people (Hargreaves and Fullan, 1992).

The three school improvement interventions acknowledge the significance of teachers' continuing professional development and their involvement in education reforms; hence Malta's wide consultation in the development of its National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) and particular emphasis on teacher empowerment (Bezzina, 2002a and 2002b; Sultana, 1999). Even in the Maldivian distance learning project, the importance of teaching assistants in the regional centres and the involvement of teachers in the development of multimedia packages were noted by the programme developers, despite the scarcity of human resources in the system. Bezzina (ibid: 66) observes, however, that the context within which teachers operate in Maltese schools is unlikely to bring about empowerment:

...teaching (is) still very much practiced in isolation, and collegiality is non-existent for many teachers. ... Moreover, some research on teacher empowerment reveal that some teachers do not understand empowerment, others do not want to accept the responsibility that accompanies empowerment, and others want to avoid the leadership and power it offers.

Sultana (2005: 238) advocates for a 'paradigm shift in the way the learning enterprise is conceptualised' where 'teachers must adapt their teaching style to match the *type* (not "amount") of intelligence and learning style of their students'.

Referring to Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean generally Hickling-Hudson (2004: 296) views this paradigm shift through the concept of multiple 'literacies' which she describes 'as a tool of socio-political analysis'. While agreeing that successful educational reform is largely dependent on reforms in teacher education, she maintains that the latter must also perpetrate the diverse 'literacies' and ideologies of the community if it is to be effective. Consequently in Trinidad and Tobago as in Malta changes in the curriculum and the examination systems appear to 'have made very little impression on what takes place in schools and classrooms', in the words of the Maltese Consultative Committee on Education (1995: 54).

School based management and development planning

The promotion of school based management (SBM) and development planning as strategies for reform in Malta and in Trinidad and Tobago were considered as crucial elements for the successful implementation of the reforms. In Malta SBM and development planning were seen as 'essential for the implementation of the National Minimum Curriculum' (Ministry of Education, 2001: 9), while in Trinidad and Tobago SBM was perceived

...as the agency that will facilitate the transformation of the school into a place where administrators, teachers, students, parents and others engage in critical interaction for the development of the child and, indeed, the community, where positive cultures are developed, where appropriate opportunities and experiences for injecting into the society more humanistic knowledge, values and skills. (Newton, 2000: 8)

However, Newton went on to observe that thus far 'no indication of any evaluation of its implementation or impact' had been done, although a great deal of training of principals and senior teachers had occurred. Hickling-Hudson (ibid) seemed even more pessimistic: she noted that the reforms were unlikely to bring

about the required changes as long as the school system remained stratified, didactic, authoritarian and competitive.

According to Bezzina (2002b), while Maltese school principals welcomed the greater autonomy afforded by the decentralisation policy and the participative nature of the NMC, they were concerned about having to take on considerable additional responsibilities, which made the job more stressful. They also observed that the process was a partial one only where for instance, they had no say in the recruitment of teachers. Bezzina also identified one major challenge for principals: the need to make 'a paradigm shift in norms, skills, attitudes and beliefs' (Bezzina, 2002b: 15).

The concerns expressed above may be indicative of a degree of mismatch between globalizing trends in education reforms and the local teachers' and school leaders' perceptions and interpretations of the local reform aims and strategies. Carnoy and Rhoten (2002) note that decentralisation policies became a key feature of education reform strategies in the 1990s, and were adopted by many countries in different parts of the world. Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe (2004: 30) discussing decentralisation in Mongolia, question 'the transferability of decentralisation policies and experiences from one cultural context to another.' Linked to this are the notions of teachers as professionals and teacher autonomy which Lauglo (1995) argues is steeped in socio-cultural knowledge and beliefs about education in different societies. In SIDS, where there is a strong tendency for centralisation of educational governance and finance, and emphasis on

personalised working relationships (Bray, 1991), the nature of such reforms becomes somewhat paradoxical.

Colonial legacies and adaptations to the SIDS context

While each system has made adaptations to their reform strategies, it could still be argued that the strongest common factor in the three SI programmes is their close connections with British, or western educational improvement models of the time. This may not be surprising as ‘the overall structure and orientation of schools remain strongly Western’ (Bray, 1993: 336) in most SIDS with colonial legacies. The financing of development projects also has an influence on their orientations: the World Bank, perpetrating its own preferred models (Bray, *ibid*), was involved in both the Trinidad and Tobago and the earlier phase of the Maldives projects.

Some of the issues discussed above resurface in the Seychelles SIP, which is the subject of the final section of this review.

The Seychelles School Improvement Programme

The general and historical perspectives of the Programme were discussed in Chapter One. This section reviews existing literature on the Seychelles School Improvement Programme (SIP) and discusses evaluations of the programme carried out so far, in the light of its aims and objectives and the shortcomings it set out to address.

Aims and objectives of the SIP

The school improvement model adopted by the Seychelles education system was strongly influenced by theories and models that evolved in Britain in the early 1990s, which are discussed in the first section of this literature review. In a report submitted to the Commonwealth Secretariat in 2000, the Steering Committee for the SIP noted that the ‘key elements of the (SIP) design were inspired largely by models from Scotland and the UK’ (SIP Secretariat, 2000: 16). The focus is on school-based development, guided by ‘the principles of devolution, ownership and partnership’ (SIP Secretariat, 2000: 8) with a view to strengthening schools’ capacity to ‘take more active responsibility for managing teaching and learning’.

The SIP Secretariat report (2000: 17) outlined the school improvement literature that has guided its orientation:

The research work on ‘School Effectiveness’ and ‘School Improvement’ by authors such as John Beresford, David Hopkins, Geoff Southworth, Mel Ainscow and Michael Fielding, based on their experiences of supporting schools involved in school improvement in Cambridge and Essex, and research projects such as ‘Improving the Quality of Education for All’ (IQEA), provided a model for giving external support to school improvement. The works of Michael Fullan provided valuable lessons on the change process.

The Seychelles SIP has three major aims:

- To bring about qualitative improvements in students’ learning by transforming school cultures and enabling staff to take a more proactive role in managing change and improvement in their schools;
- To improve the support system at Ministry level so that all support unit/sections are able to provide more focussed and co-ordinated assistance to schools, especially in the area of development planning;
- To translate the findings of school improvement and school effectiveness into practical applications of what constitutes good schools in the context of

Seychelles, and to develop the capacity to audit schools against these agreed criteria.

(Adapted from SIP Secretariat, 2000)

The report further explained that these aims were judged to be realistic at the time, both in terms of the human capacity and available resources in the country. There was adequate infrastructure, adequate staffing and trained headteachers, adequate resources, a structured national curriculum and well established support structures and units at central level. The project intended to address a number of weaknesses in the system, which had been diagnosed through the work of the Country Working Group, the perceived trends in national examination results and anecdotal evidence. The main areas of weakness, in the view of the Steering Committee (SIP Secretariat, 2000) were: pupil underperformance, fragmented in-service training, low teacher morale, limited opportunities for professional development, a strong blame syndrome throughout the system, lack of transparency and consultation, a lack of co-ordination among the support units of the Ministry, a lack of teacher involvement in curriculum development, limited support for development planning in schools and an absence of favourable conditions for greater school autonomy. The SIP therefore aimed to:

...work from within the administration of schools to bring about changes in school climate, management structures, and staff and pupil attitudes that would be more conducive to school improvement and lead to improved results for pupils (SIP Secretariat, *ibid*: 15).

The main strategies through which these aims were to be achieved were the institutionalisation of development planning and staff professional development, the strengthening of support to school leaders and the provision of quality assurance. A number of structures and mechanisms were put in place to manage

and support the Programme, both at school and central levels (SIP Secretariat, *ibid*).

Development Planning and Professional Development

The development planning model

The development planning model adopted by the Seychelles SIP was based on

...the work of Hargreaves and Hopkins 'The Empowered School' (1991)' which provided good and practical background information on how to construct and manage development plans. The development planning cycle, which was proposed to schools was modelled on this work. (SIP Secretariat, 2000: 16)

The Ministry of Education's Country Report produced for the 14th Conference of Commonwealth ministers also highlights the SIP as 'a major innovation' (Ministry of Education, 2000c: 23) and it views school development planning as a key strategy for the transformation of school cultures. This view is reiterated in the first evaluation report of teachers' perceptions of the SIP (Ministry of Education, 2000a: 2) thus: 'One of the key tools for bringing about improvement in schools is development planning.' An outline of the development plan format is also given:

The School Development Plan contains the school's: (i) Mission Statement (ii) Background (a short description of the school) (iii) Audit Reports (maintenance/development audits) (iv) Priorities (v) Summary of Two/ Three-Year Plan (vi) Evaluation Report (vii) Staff Development Plan. (*Ibid*: 2)

According to this report, the majority of teachers surveyed '(saw) the value of having a development plan and setting targets for improvement' (*ibid*: 23). They also felt that school action plans were realistic. Almost 70% of the teachers felt that teachers had the expertise to cope with the tasks of school based development planning but at the same time 50% of respondents were of the view that there was

‘confusion’ about development planning. The research group – mainly members of the SIP Steering Committee – speculated that this may be ‘associated with the denial and rejection of change’ (ibid: 24). The study also highlighted problems of time management at school level, high staff turnover of key people for SI in the schools and structural changes in secondary schools as influential factors in teachers’ perceptions of the SIP.

In a second evaluation of the SIP carried out in primary schools in 2001 by the Ministry of Education, with the assistance of two members of the South African Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), the evaluation team found that ‘although the majority of schools have their plans, of critical concern is their organisational ethos and systems. The critical challenge facing schools is whether they have ‘the institutional capacity to implement the schools’ plans’ (Ministry of Education / HSRC, 2002: 53). Associated difficulties were thought to be related to time management at teaching and leadership levels; the need for further training in project management, monitoring and evaluation; the need for greater involvement of parents in school life and frequent leadership changes at both school and Ministry levels (Ministry of Education/ HSRC, ibid).

Staff Professional Development

School development and teacher development are closely linked in the School Improvement Programme in Seychelles and are dependent on each other. It is firmly believed that schools will only improve if teachers improve and work collaboratively.

(SIP Secretariat, 2000: 37)

The Ministry of Education/ HSRC report (2002: 37) affirms the SIP leaders’ commitment to promoting professional development through advocating for the

establishment of ‘a structured programme of school-based staff development linked to the school’s action plan’ and based on teachers’ identified needs. At the outset of the implementation of the SIP ‘a one and a half weekly session (was) incorporated into the regular school timetable nationally to facilitate teacher development’ (Ministry of Education, 2000a: 2), along with the appointment of a professional development facilitator (PDF) – a teacher willing to organise and co-ordinate PD activities in the schools.

The Ministry of Education/ HSRC report (2002: 44) examined the role of the PDFs and considered it ‘an important role in planning, developing and monitoring school plans in consultation with the SI teams.’ In most of the primary schools PDFs also led the SIT. They took on an advocacy role for PD and promoted networking and support strategies between teachers and schools. They were strongly supported by the SIP Secretariat and other Ministry agencies through continuous professional development. Their commitment to school improvement is readily acknowledged in the report.

The study of teachers’ perceptions of the SIP (Ministry of Education, 2000a: 16) revealed that teachers tended to rate ‘their own personal commitment and enthusiasm for professional learning very highly’. Almost 75% of them agreed that the professional development activities had relevance for them as teachers and that their school management supported PD. Over 66% of the teachers also felt that the PD sessions had a positive impact on their classroom practice. This led the research team to further comment: ‘The picture we get is that of a highly motivated and enthusiastic staff, desirous to improve themselves’ (ibid).

However, they also found certain contradictions in the teachers' responses. While agreeing that they readily shared professional concerns and asked for help, the majority also said that teachers showed little enthusiasm to work with colleagues.

The research team proposed the following explanation:

There is still a lot of reluctance to engage in types of work which involve joint planning and teaching sessions. Teaching is still very much an isolated activity, especially at the secondary level, and attempts to introduce peer teaching have met with limited success.

(Ministry of Education, 2000a: 17)

This reflects Bezzina's (2002a) views regarding the isolation of teachers and teaching in Malta. In the Seychelles change in this area are compounded by difficulties in monitoring the impact of PD on classroom practice, especially in secondary schools where teachers seemed to 'attach less value to professional development sessions as a factor in making schools better' (Ministry of Education, 2000a: 18). Most teachers were also not happy with the timing of the PD sessions.

The Ministry of Education / HSRC report (2002: 51) comes to similar conclusions in certain areas. Commenting on the mandatory nature of PD, it observed that this 'blanket requirement... may be taking a toll on the morale of the teachers.' The report recommends some flexibility in PD organisation 'to alleviate the perception of unnecessary coercion' (ibid: 51).

Another challenge that came to light through this evaluation concerns 'the professional ethos of the staff' and their 'level of preparedness to meet the new educational challenges' (ibid: 52). The report suggested that

[T]he professional profile and qualifications of teachers in the Seychelles need to be addressed to enhance effective implementation of the SIP. Poorly trained and under-qualified teachers compromise not only the educational ethos but the overall application of the SIP in the classroom context as well. (ibid: 52)

It also noted that there was ‘weak common theorising among the SIP structures’ and ‘systemic imbalance between support and expectations’ (ibid: 50-51).

Similar issues were highlighted by Sultana (2001) in his keynote address at the Seychelles Annual Education Conference of 2001. He observed that ‘educational reform can only happen if teachers are persuaded that the shift, what we have been calling the ‘new deal’, is meaningful and sound’; that they ‘understand and appreciate the worthiness of the vision, and feel valued and supported’ (ibid: 25). He was of the view that teachers were ‘not necessarily on board and may not quite own the vision that has been developed for the Seychelles’. He feared that ‘that the teaching corps in the Seychelles (was) in danger of becoming somewhat demoralised.’— a situation akin to that in Malta and Trinidad and Tobago.

School Leadership

The SIP recognised from the start that strong and participative leadership is a critical aspect of school improvement (SIP Secretariat, 2000). In its study of teachers’ perceptions of the SIP (Ministry of Education, 2000a: 19) the report noted:

One of the objectives of the national School Improvement Programme has been to encourage a shift towards a more participative management style, which is conducive to whole-school involvement in development planning and staff commitment to goals and targets.

On the issue of participative management, the Ministry of Education / HSRC report (2002) found that two thirds of headteachers believed there was

participatory management in their schools, and they gave examples of teachers' involvement in various school committees, in PD planning and the development of school policies. However, the report noted that 'less than half the headteachers mentioned SIP activities as a way of involving teachers' (ibid: 73).

Another area of concern brought out in this study is the extent to which the schools' management teams (SMT) provided pedagogical leadership. Only 45% of headteachers thought that the SMT spent more than 50% of their time providing guidance to teachers related to teaching and learning. The SIP's expectations seem to be higher in this domain, but as the report pointed out, benchmarks should be determined 'with the object of establishing optimal allocation level of the headteacher's time' (ibid: 104).

In both studies (evaluation of SIP in primary schools and teachers' perceptions of SIP), the majority of teachers seemed positive about the management climate of their schools, feeling that SMTs were attentive to their needs and were 'open to their ideas and suggestions' (Ministry of Education, 2000a: 20). However, contradictions surfaced in both studies, with almost 50% of respondents saying that 'teachers (were) afraid to express their views about the school,' and teachers cannot talk to management when they have a problem. The teachers' perceptions study (ibid: 21) proffered some tentative reasons:

The inconsistencies may point to the existence of somewhat ambiguous attitudes to school development planning among teachers, and a grudging sense of 'ownership.' ...On the other hand it may be true that in some schools teachers' opinions and suggestions are not being taken into account sufficiently in drawing up school development plans, with the result that the process of participation loses some of its credibility.

The report speculates that another possible reason may be linked to inconsistencies in leadership styles as school management go through the transition stages of adopting a participative development planning process. The apparent disparities here are somewhat similar to the findings of a study on communication between principals and teachers in Swedish schools reported by Arlestig (2006). The tendency was for principals to present much more optimistic views than teachers and to claim successes where teachers saw none.

The same comments apply to respondents' commitment to the school's vision. In both reports (Ministry of Education, 2000a and Ministry of Education/ HSRC, 2002) heads were more inclined to believe that the school had a shared sense of purpose and commitment to its mission than did staff and parents. They were also more positive about two aspects of school ethos: heads thought that almost all the teachers knew and understood the mission of the school and that there was mutual support between pupils, parents and teachers. While 91% of the teachers said they knew and understood their school's mission, less than half of them had 'a positive opinion on the support teachers, pupils and parents give each other' (ibid: 72).

The Ministry of Education / HSRC report (2002: 75) found a strong expression of commitment to the school's vision on the part of pupils and the majority of teachers but nearly a quarter of the teachers were 'unclear about where the school wants to go' (ibid: 76). 18% could not explain their school's vision and 23% disagreed that management was doing all it could to bring staff together. This 'split of opinion' appeared to obtain among heads as well: 'five of the 20 who

responded disagree that there is wide commitment to a school vision among teachers, pupils and parents' (ibid: 76).

The study of teachers' perceptions (Ministry of Education, 2000a) displayed similar patterns: '81% of respondents believe that *teachers in their school share a vision of what they want their school to become in future*' (ibid: 20) but at the same time 55% say that '*most decisions are taken by the same small group of people*' and 35% of teachers are 'not convinced that *their school is moving forward*' (ibid: 21, original italics).

Overall views on the SIP

The Ministry of Education / HSRC report (2002) found that there was national awareness of the SIP and every school was also aware of its aims. It had provided a common vision for schools and some sections of the Ministry, and ensured a high level of commitment from a large proportion of staff in schools. Development planning and school-based professional development have become institutionalised and some schools indicated improvements in instructional strategies as a result of the programme. There is increased collaboration among and within schools and indications of improved social relationships between staff, learners and management teams across schools, as a result of the work of the SIT and the promotion of PD, especially by PDFs.

The report also revealed a number of challenges, which may have limited the impact of the SIP on the school system. These include insufficient financial backup; frequent staff movement within schools and the Ministry; shortages of

qualified teachers; schools' limited capacities to implement the various plans they develop; weak theorising among the SIP support mechanisms and limited expertise related to workable school improvement strategies; imbalance between support and pressure measures, and poorly maintained physical environment of schools.

From the preliminary findings (final report still awaited) of the 2003 survey of the impact of the SIP on secondary schools, the same gains and challenges seemed to apply (SIP Secretariat, 2004). Additionally, in the area of school leadership, it was found that headteachers played a very limited role in monitoring teacher performance, leaving this function to heads of departments who had had no preparation for taking on such responsibilities. Heads generally tended to focus on administrative duties rather than on providing pedagogical guidance and only half the teachers felt that they had a say in the running of their schools.

One of the major challenges for the SIP is that its selected model assumes a considerable degree of school autonomy, often through some form of school based management (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988). This has far reaching implications for schools which operate in small-state centralised systems (Smawfield, 1993), 'along civil service traditions of the early twentieth century', as Sultana (1999: 4) put it in respect of Malta. Like Malta, the Seychelles education system also retains 'a strong reliance on UK based educational models,' (Sultana, *ibid*) policy making strategies, and curriculum orientation and materials. The vast majority of education leaders and teachers have been trained in UK, Australia and France, and the country still assesses the academic performance of

emotional state of guilt' (ibid: 61) whereas in some cultures – Asian cultures for instance – the equivalent associated emotion is shame. Consequently, they argue:

In shame-prone cultures (common in Asian countries) accountability would not only be weak, but people would be actively engaged in hiding or preventing the disclosure of information.

Seychelles society tends towards the 'shame-prone cultures' with much attention being given to the avoidance of losing face and keeping on good terms with people. This is in addition to a strong dependency culture (Benedict, 1970), which dates back to the establishment of this island society in the 1800s. Benedict (ibid: 66) notes: 'Nearly everything was, and to a large extent still is, outside of the individual's control. Moreover, he is used to looking for direction from above'.

Relationship between the Literature Review and the research

This literature review influenced the case study design used in this study in a number of significant ways. The Seychelles SIP model was itself derived from the approach proposed by Hopkins (1996). The four main themes of this model (visioning, development planning, professional development and leadership) underpinned the research questions and strongly influenced the structure of the analysis.

The Hopkins (1996) model guided the purposive sampling of the documents, from both the Ministry of Education and the case study schools. This model, along with other school improvement literature, also influenced the development of the interview schedules and the observation frameworks. The sources directly relevant to the Seychelles case were particularly helpful in contextualising the

enquiry. The literature on small island states was valuable in planning the approach to the impact of scale on school improvement.

School improvement that focuses on the development of people is an important aspect of the Seychelles SIP. The literature dealing with various aspects and types of professional learning in schools influenced the approach to discussions of PD in the research findings. The literature dealing with the implementation in both developed and small island contexts helped to guide that part of the enquiry focused on implementation and impact. The research design and methodology are discussed at length in the next chapter.

Summary

Concepts of school improvement evolved over time, with a shift of focus from change at organisational level to changes at classroom level, in teaching and learning. Various strategies such as school self evaluation, development planning, SBM and organisational learning have been used to bring about school improvement, taking into account, to some extent, the context specificity of its many elements. However, weak theorising and difficulties in maintaining the focus on learning have somewhat hampered the establishment of a sound theoretical basis for future research and development.

The ISIP, the IQEA and the Commonwealth's TMS programme were the most influential in the development of the Seychelles SIP. They also provide an indication of the diversity of the conceptualisations and of the context specificity of school improvement initiatives. These issues recur in the school improvement

projects of Trinidad and Tobago, Malta and the Maldives, in addition to highlighting the crucial role of teachers and school leaders in school improvement along with the need for adaptability in the process of policy and model borrowing. Strong colonial legacies, centralised approaches to educational change and personalised work relationships are some of the common factors that have influenced the school improvement innovations in the SIDS. They apply also in the Seychelles where a UK model was adopted and adapted system-wide ten years ago. The extent to which the SIP is perceived to be achieving its aims is the subject of the present research, and the chapter that follows outlines and discusses the research methodology employed for the purpose.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

In the context of school improvement in SIDS and, in particular, the Seychelles School Improvement Programme discussed in the final section of the previous chapter, this research project aims to identify the factors that may help secondary schools in Seychelles to develop the internal capacity to improve. It also attempts to establish the basis for a possible model for more successful school improvement in SIDS, and intends to contribute to a better understanding of school improvement in the Seychelles and in SIDS. By examining the most salient aspects of the SIP through the perspectives of different groups of people directly involved in the programme, it is expected that the present research can present the multi-faceted nature of the SIP and the multiple forms of people's understanding of it.

The research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Do the sampled schools have stated visions and do members of the school show allegiance to them?
2. What are the main characteristics of development planning in Seychelles secondary schools, as represented by the sampled schools?
3. To what extent is development planning seen by the management and staff of the schools as a tool for school improvement?
4. What are the main characteristics of professional development in the schools?

5. In what ways do management and staff link professional development activities to school improvement?
6. To what extent are these professional development activities important to them?
7. To what extent do management and staff think the professional development activities of the school impact on their classroom practice?
8. What are the characteristics of school leadership in the sampled schools?
9. To what extent do headteachers and deputies think they practice participative styles of leadership and why?
10. To what extent are the phenomena and conditions emerging from the foregoing questions specific to SIDS?
11. What are the factors that may enhance the schools' internal capacities to improve?

The questions focus on teachers' and school management's perceptions of school improvement, in relation to the schools' stated visions, the process of development planning, school-based professional development and leadership styles, the most significant aspects of the SIP. The research questions also consider these stated aspects of school improvement in the light of the characteristics of SIDS.

This chapter describes, explains and justifies the research methodology used in this investigation. More specifically, it states the principles and paradigms underlying the research design; it explains and justifies the case study approach chosen for this investigation; it describes and provides a rationale for the research

tools used and explains the procedures for sampling, piloting and data collection. The chapter also addresses issues of reliability, validity and triangulation as well as those of ethics. Finally, it considers processes and techniques for data analysis.

Research paradigms

Ongoing debates about the nature and purpose of educational research (Hargreaves, 1996; Hammersley, 1997; Atkinson, 2000; Ball, 2001 among others) set the background to research and development in education internationally. This debate seems to highlight a tension between education practitioners and researchers with regard to the impact of research on educational policies and practice. While Hargreaves (1996:7) maintains that ‘research is expected to make serious contributions to fundamental theory or knowledge’ as well as having to be relevant to practice, others (such as Hammersley, 1997; Day, 1997; Bates, 2002) contend that the complexity of this area of research rules out such simplistic deductions. They argue that it is too complex a field to assume there can be direct links between research and its application to classroom practice. Atkinson (2000:322), for instance, sees the role of educational research as primarily:

the possibility of promoting and extending critical discourse among both researchers and teachers, and of opening up channels for debate and consideration of a *range* of solutions to classroom problems.

This view is echoed by Ball (2001: 266) who also conceives of research as ‘an educative process that could contribute to teachers’ reflection, decision-making and judgements about their practice; not tell them what to do’.

The growing emphasis on the importance of research that informs policy and practice, and that also involves both practitioners and researchers, is traced by

Hammersley (1997), who points to the shortcomings of the research paradigms borrowed from the natural sciences as one of the limiting factors. He considers the gradual shift away from a scientific model with positivist orientations, as a reaction to ‘genuine problems’ in educational research, in particular the ‘failure of this work to produce conclusive, cumulative findings’ (ibid: 144). While discussions on these issues have been wide-ranging and, in Hammersley’s view, sometimes self-indulgent, he maintains that:

At the core of them is precisely the question of the extent to which one can have a science of human behaviour of a kind that models itself, even remotely, on the natural sciences. (Ibid: 144)

Such debates may have tended towards what Gorard (2001) has termed ‘paradigm wars’ which have led to a degree of association of educational research - especially practitioner research - with qualitative research approaches. He considers as unproductive the ‘false dualism of ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ approaches’ (ibid: 346) and argues instead for a choice of approaches based on the principle of ‘fitness for purpose’ (ibid: 345). However, as Morrison (2002) points out, it is important to be clear about the philosophical tradition and epistemological perspectives underpinning the research as these may have considerable bearing on the researcher’s own perspectives and the possible outcomes of the research.

This research project aims to inform current practices related to the Seychelles school improvement programme. It takes a qualitative methodological orientation, using an ‘interpretative and subjective approach’, which ‘seeks to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors’ (Cohen et al, 2003: 181). It is based on the following assumptions:

- People construct their social world and bring in their own personal meanings to situations.
- These meanings are linked to their perceptions and interpretations of reality, resulting in multiple forms of understanding.
- ‘Reality’ is multi-layered and complex.
- While the researcher endeavours to understand events from the viewpoints of the participants, s/he acknowledges the significance of reflexivity in research.

(Adapted from Cohen et al, 2003, and Morrison, 2002)

The research approach

The research is an evaluative case study (Merriam, 1988, and Bassey, 2002) of a 40% sample of state comprehensive secondary schools in Seychelles, which have been involved in the SIP since 1996. According to Bassey (2002:114), evaluative case studies are ‘enquiries which set out to explore some educational programmes, system, project or event in order to focus on its worthwhileness.’ This definition matches the aims of the research and the research questions being posed. In this instance ‘worthwhileness’ relates to the factors to be identified that may have an effect on ‘what works’ in the Seychelles SIP. For the purposes of this research the case study is considered as formative as well as summative (Bassey, 2002), as it intends to help the further development of the SIP through an assessment of progress made so far.

Yin (2003: 13-14) provides a more detailed definition of case study, which takes into account the ‘all-encompassing’ nature of this research strategy, ‘covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis’ (ibid:14). Thus he proposes that:

1. *A case study is an empirical enquiry that*

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and content are not clearly evident.

2. The case study enquiry

- copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interests than data points, and as one result
- relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
- benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.

(original italics)

According to Yin, this definition considers the case study as a comprehensive research approach, which can apply equally to both single and multiple case studies as well as to evaluative research, which is the case in the present research, as it involves a case study encompassing multiple sites and is evaluative in nature. Case study is now widely accepted and used as a form of research, both in its own right and as an element of a larger research design (Simons, 1996; Yin, 2003).

This researcher maintains that the underlying principle in the selection of methodological approaches is fitness for purpose (Gorard, 2001), and in this instance the case study seems to be best suited to the research design. Since the intention is to obtain a fairly detailed picture of the main aspects of the process of school improvement in the sampled schools, as perceived by persons directly involved in the SIP, the case study is judged to be the approach that can yield the richest data related to both the uniqueness and the complexity of the situation (Simons, 1996). Verma and Mallick (1999: 114) note that one of its strengths is that ‘it allows the researcher to focus on a specific instance or situation and to explore the various interactive processes at work within that situation’. Cohen et

al (2000), adapting from Adelman et al (1984), point to some of the possible advantages and weaknesses of case studies, namely that:

1. Case study data is ‘strong in reality’, being down-to-earth and close to the reader’s own experience, although it is difficult to organise. The results are often written in everyday language, readily accessible to a wider audience. The authors do note, however, the possibility of journalistic and anecdotal styles of reporting which may distort the whole picture.
2. Case studies tend to catch unique features of a situation or phenomenon, features which may hold the key to understanding the situation/ phenomenon. They capture the subtlety and complexity of the case in its own right.
3. They can take into account unanticipated events and uncontrolled variables.
4. They provide insight into other, similar situations, thus allowing a degree of generalisability about an instance or from an instance to a class.
5. However, from a broader perspective, the results of case studies may not be generalisable except where other researchers may see their application.
6. They tend to be selective, biased and subjective, not easily open to cross-checking.
7. While they do attempt to address the issue of reflexivity, case studies are prone to problems of observer bias.

On the question of generalisability, Bassey (1999 and 2001) proposes the use of fuzzy generalisations, which he distinguishes from scientific and statistical generalisations, on the basis that they contain an element of uncertainty. He describes it as ‘a qualified generalisation, carrying the idea of possibility but not certainty’ (Bassey, 1999: 49). He suggests that this concept of fuzzy

generalisations is an appropriate one for research in areas such as education 'where human complexity is paramount' (ibid: 52). Hammersley (2001), however, argues that this is not a distinctive type of generalisation. In his view, Bassey's fuzzy generalisation is a type of formulation which should apply in all predictions related to scientific generalisations in any case.

Yin (2003: 10), on the other hand, deals with the issue of scientific generalisation by comparing the case study with the scientific experiment where generalisations may be based on a single experiment. He concludes that 'case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes.' Therefore, like with the experiment, 'the case study does not represent a "sample," ' (ibid: 10) but it allows for the possibility of expanding and generalising theories, which he calls 'analytic generalization'. He explains that in case studies an investigator is attempting to 'generalize a particular set of results to some broader theory' (ibid: 37):

A theory must be tested by replicating the findings in a second or even third [case], where the theory has specified that the same results should occur. Once such direct replications have been made, the results might be accepted as providing strong support for the theory, even though further replications had not been performed. (ibid: 37)

As the present study involves the same kinds of enquiry being carried out in four different schools, it should be possible, using Yin's concept of analytical generalisability, to derive a theoretical framework that may serve as a means of generalising the findings of the cases being studied.

The case study schools

One of the basic tenets of case studies is the importance of the context within which the phenomena being studied occur. Cohen et al (2000:181) maintain that case studies recognise ‘that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects’, while Bassey (1999: 60) states that ‘it is unlikely that educational actions, or the consequences of educational decisions, can be studied trustworthily other than in their natural context’. Johnson (1994: 20) also emphasises the importance of context: the case study ‘investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’. Fertig (2000: 395) argues that taking account of contexts in education research is ‘of particular significance for developing countries’ which, for various reasons, adopt educational models from the developed world without appropriate contextualisation.

In this study the adopted model of school improvement and school development planning derived significantly from the UK model, as discussed in Chapter Two. The units of analysis are four state regional secondary schools in Seychelles, from rural and urban areas, three of them located on the main island of Mahé and one on another island. The sizes range from six hundred to just over one thousand students and, like the other six state regional secondary schools of the country, they offer five years of general education, four of which are compulsory. General education in Seychelles is underpinned by principles of inclusive education, curriculum breadth and an emphasis on the development of communication skills (Ministry of Education, 2000). The schools are financed almost entirely by the state and all major aspects of school management and resourcing are centrally

controlled by the Ministry of Education. This level of centralisation may facilitate generalisation within the Seychelles and to other SIDS, as the school improvement principles and practices adopted tend to be highly prescriptive and quite tightly controlled from the centre (Purvis, 2004).

The Research Tools

Bassey (1999: 69) points out that in case study research there are ‘no specific methods of data collection or of analysis which are unique to it as a method of enquiry.’ Rather, he suggests that the researcher’s choice of data collection methods should be guided by ‘considerations of research ethics’ (ibid). However, he also notes that there are three main methods of collecting research data in case studies: ‘asking questions (and listening intently to the answers), observing events (and noting carefully what happens) and reading documents’ (ibid: 81).

An important feature of the case study emphasised by Cohen et al (2000: 185), is the use of ‘a diverse range of techniques employed in the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data.’ Simons (1996: 4) also maintains that the case study allows for ‘multiple methods of data gathering’ which can lead to deeper understanding, as it is ‘more open, complex and presenting multiple perspectives’ (ibid: 5). Making use of a range of data gathering techniques also allows for the possibility of methodological triangulation in order to ensure greater validity.

In consideration of the above, and the context in which the research takes place, the following three methods of data collection are used in this study: documentary

analysis, semi-structured interviews, and observation of certain aspects of improvement processes in schools.

Documentary Analysis

A review of a range of documents directly related to school development planning and improvement initiatives in the sampled schools was carried out, as a means of obtaining supplementary data. These included original copies of the schools' development plans; evaluation reports (of both internal and external evaluations); professional development plans; school improvement (SI) co-ordinators' reports and minutes of meetings of the school improvement teams. These documents are the main records of the processes and activities of the SIP at both school and Ministry levels. They should yield information that gives a fuller picture of the background and the context of the phenomenon being researched.

Johnson (1994: 58) describes documents or records as research tools that already exist 'in a definitive form' and therefore have to be drawn upon as sources of data in the form in which they stand. Robson (1994: 238) considers this as problematic, in the sense that the material is 'not structured with the needs of the [researcher] in mind;' it has a purpose of its own, and 'that purpose is important in understanding and interpreting the results of the analysis.'

Cortazzi, (2002: 196) argues that documentary analysis offers 'fresh ways to explore the meanings and social functions of texts in educational research.' Texts, especially written texts, are given 'an aura of respectability', being considered as 'evidence of past and current realities or future plans' (ibid). However, he further

observes that texts, as a form of discourse, 'do not simply reflect reality, they also construct it and contribute to subsequent views of it' (ibid: 197). Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 73) also note that 'documentary reality does not consist of descriptions of the social world that can be used directly as evidence about it. ...they construct their own kinds of reality.' It is therefore important, as Cortazzi (ibid: 197) suggests, for the researcher 'to go beyond the obvious, and to look at the language and social dimensions of the evidence, to set it in broader contexts, and to question previous assumptions about it.'

Scott (1990) proposes four main criteria for assessing the quality of documentary evidence: authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning. With regard to authenticity and credibility, the documents concerned in the present study were genuine original copies kept by the schools or by the Ministry of Education. However, authorship of the documents is generally not known, other than their having been the result of the combined efforts of members of the SITs or school improvement co-ordinators. In all cases the documents are written in English which is a second language for all their authors.

In terms of representativeness and meaning, these documents contain the major records of the development and the implementation of the SIP in the schools. They were interpreted using content analysis, through the classification of themes, keywords and meanings (Cortazzi, 2002; Scott, 1990), which relate directly to the themes identified through the interviews.

Interviews

Interviews, according to Cohen et al (2000: 267), show ‘the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasises the social situatedness of research data’. Thus it enables the participants (both interviewers and interviewees) to discuss and negotiate their interpretations of the worlds they live in. The extent to which such negotiations may happen, however, depends largely on the level of formality of the interview. Bell (1994: 17) discusses the range of interview types, and considers the highly formalised interview at one extreme ‘where the interviewer behaves as much like a machine as possible’ and at the other end, the totally informal interview ‘in which the shape is determined by individual respondents’.

Generally a distinction is made between three types of face-to-face interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Wragg (2002: 148) suggests that structured interviews are best used when a lot of questions are asked which are not particularly contentious or thought provoking, whereas semi-structured interviews are better where the investigation ‘requires more profound deliberation’. He explains that the semi-structured interview is normally guided by a ‘carefully worded interview schedule’ (ibid: 149) but the interviewer may ask additional probing questions and make notes along the way, allowing the respondent to speak at length but within the parameters of the questions asked.

The semi-structured interview was considered best suited to the purposes of this study for the following reasons:

- its adaptability and flexibility (Bell, 1994; Wragg, 2002) – interviews can be adapted to time and place and the interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and enable respondents to take more control of the topic.
- Sensitivity and enrichment of data: the semi-structured interview allows for the expression of feelings which can be considered as positive aspects of the context and can affect interpretations (Mills, 2001).
- Cultural appropriateness: Seychelles society having a strong oral culture (Benedict and Benedict, 1982), people tend to be more responsive to the spoken word rather than the written form.

In addition to the type of interview, various other factors that may affect the nature of the data collected through interviews have been identified. Mills (2001: 300) cites ‘the people involved, the location, the time of day, the function, purpose and topic of the interaction’. Wragg (2002) adds as other possible sources of bias, the type of questions asked and the language used, especially in multilingual contexts. Both authors also note issues of control and power relations between participants, and the acknowledged status of the interviewer who comes along, either from the inside or outside of the institution involved, with a pre-considered set of questions. Bell (1994: 56) while acknowledging the advantages of being an ‘inside’ researcher - having ‘intimate knowledge of the context of the research and of the micropolitics of the institution’ – also points to the difficulties of maintaining objectivity. Merriam et al (2001) argue that there is a greater complexity than previously assumed inherent in this insider/outsider status, with no clear delineation between the two positions. They suggest that ‘in the real

world of data collection, there is a good bit of slippage and fluidity between these two states' (ibid: 405).

Bush (2002: 66), also cautioning about the possibilities of bias, states that 'bias is likely to be endemic, particularly in semi-structured and unstructured interviews, and is difficult to eliminate.' In the circumstances of the present study it is particularly difficult to ensure that all possibilities of bias are eliminated. The researcher's position as an acknowledged senior official of the Ministry of Education, and being personally known to almost all interviewees involved, places her in an ambivalent position of being partly an insider and partly an outsider to the interview situation. This reflects the 'slippage and fluidity' referred to by Merriam et al (ibid). The researcher can only heed Bell's advice on the matter of objectivity: to show honesty, integrity and openness about the whole exercise while taking care 'not to promise too much' (ibid:98). Additionally, constant awareness of the possibilities of bias and the fact that only one researcher was involved, was helpful.

The issue of language is also relevant in this research. Seychelles has three national languages - Kreol, English and French - and all three are taught in schools and are used as medium of instruction for different subjects at different levels. It is common practice for people to engage in code switching when speaking, especially between Kreol (the mother tongue) and English. Although the questions were written in English and were put to the respondents in that language, the latter had the choice of replying in either English or Kreol or both. Kreol was sometimes used in probing for additional information. In the process of

translations the possibility of distortions or misrepresentation may occur (Wragg, *ibid*). It should be noted that all respondents had excellent command of English; the researcher is completely proficient in all three national languages and speaks Kreol as a mother tongue.

The above comments notwithstanding, the interview remains, as Wragg (*ibid*: 144) concludes, ‘a fruitful source of information when handled skilfully.’ The semi-structured interview schedule at Appendix 1a provided a guiding framework for the interviews.

Observation

Structured, non-participant observation of two SIT meetings was carried out in each school. The SIT is the main body within schools which directs, monitors and evaluates the implementation of the school’s development plan. Every school is required to have such a team and the terms of reference of the team are prescribed by the Ministry of Education. The SIT, therefore, acts as the hub for the development planning and implementation processes in the school.

The focus of the observation was mainly on content (Williams, 1994) although, where particularly relevant, process was also noted. Observations were guided by an observation schedule to be found in Appendix 2. It was decided to focus mainly on the content of the meetings, partly because it was anticipated that most issues related to school improvement would be discussed in such fora; and also, in terms of practicalities and time limitations, a single researcher needs to consider the amount of data that can reasonably be handled.

Through the observation of SIT meetings the researcher intended to seek additional information that may give ‘a more holistic picture’ (Moyles, 2002: 178) of participants views’ on school improvement. The purpose was to obtain data that may not be forthcoming through interviews, as the participants’ perceptions may be clouded by other considerations related to the context, their knowledge of the researcher and their personal feelings about issues dealt with in the study. Foster (1996: 13) also suggests that ‘where evaluative judgements are required it is usually inappropriate to rely on participants’ views’, as they tend to have ‘a strong motivation to present favourable views of their own, or of their school’s performance’. In the present context of a highly centralised education system in a small island state, there is also the strong tendency for participants to anticipate the official viewpoint and make the kinds of responses they think the researcher wants to hear (Bell, 1994).

Observation is considered a powerful and flexible research tool, affording the researcher ‘the opportunity to gather ‘live’ data from ‘live’ situations (Cohen et al, 2000: 305). As Moyles (2002: 172) observes, it ‘seeks explicit evidence through the eyes of the observer’; it can enrich and supplement data gathered through other techniques, thus allowing for triangulation and greater reliability. *What* is to be observed, and *how* it is to be observed, depend on the purpose of the exercise (ibid).

Observation, however, has certain limitations. The fact that it is ‘inevitably filtered through the interpretive lens of the observer’ (Foster, 1996: 14), means it

cannot be a direct representation of some form of objective reality. This links to the notion of observer bias discussed by Moyles (2002), who argues that the researcher's selective attention, selective encoding, selective memory and various interpersonal factors may all have some effect on the data.

Another difficulty is the possibility of participants changing their behaviour, consciously or unconsciously, due to the fact of being observed – sometimes referred to as the problem of reactivity (Foster, 1996). He argues that as a result the 'observational account of their behaviour will be inaccurate representations of their 'usual' behaviour' (ibid: 15) and therefore not entirely reliable. He suggests a number of strategies that may minimise reactivity, including the researcher's choice of location when observing, spending additional time in the school in order that participants become accustomed to the presence of the researcher and to project a non-threatening identity, demonstrating empathy, understanding and non-judgemental attitudes.

Sampling

Cohen et al (2000: 95) maintain that 'with both qualitative and quantitative data, the essential requirement is that the sample is representative of the population from which it is drawn'. This is important for the purpose of generalising the findings of the research (Fogelman, 2002). The school system in Seychelles being so small, it has been possible to work with a 40% sample of secondary schools.

Case studies

Sampling in this study was done in stages, with the case study schools being selected through the process of stratified sampling (Fogelman, 2002; Cohen et al, 2000), while the persons to be interviewed were selected on the basis of purposive sampling. Four of the secondary schools – one rural, one urban, one sub-urban and one on another island - constitute the sample for this study (see Table 3.1).

Region:		Urban	Suburban	Rural	Island	Total
Total population	Schools	3	2	3	2	10
	Teachers	162	115	187	72	536
	Pupils	2220	1515	2725	930	7390
Sample	Schools	1	1	1	1	4
	Teachers	54	59	58	50	221
	Pupils	826	811	798	711	3146
Sample % of population	Schools	33.3%	50%	33.3%	50%	40%
	Teachers	33.3%	51%	31%	69%	41%
	Pupils	37%	54%	29.3%	76%	42.6%

Table 3.1: Sample for the study, in the context of secondary school and teacher population – 2005 figures.

The schools were selected on the basis of their location (rural, urban, sub-urban and other islands) and their size, which roughly represent, in total, close to half the population of teachers and students in the state secondary school system. The inclusion of the two schools with male heads is also deliberate, an attempt to maintain a degree of gender balance. Stratified sampling was used as a means of ensuring a fair representation of the type of secondary schools in Seychelles, as well as taking into account the main characteristics of these schools (Cohen et al, 2000). Sub-urban schools were considered as a separate category because of recent expansions of relatively large housing estates in those areas, whereas the

sizes of the other island schools are totally determined by the size of the permanent population of these smaller islands.

Interview population

Within the selected cases, twelve respondents from each school were selected for one-to-one interviews. The purposive sampling for this was done on the basis of membership of the SIT in the case of six respondents. This group necessarily includes the head, the two deputies and the professional development facilitator. For the other six respondents, they had to be representatives of three subject departments (Maths, Science and English), who were not members of the SIT, and who had been in the school for a minimum of three years. Thus out a total of 221 teachers working in the sampled schools, 48 were interviewed, ie. 21.5% of the total number of teachers in the sampled schools.

Members of the SIT were selected because they form part of, and perform leading roles in, the group that spearheads improvement initiatives in the schools. The other six respondents who were not SIT members were selected for that very reason, so that they may bring comparative perspectives. The subject departments chosen represent the core subject areas of the national curriculum. Selection of the two individuals per department depended very much on the numbers who met the ‘minimum of three years in the school’ criteria and who accepted to participate. The level of movement amongst teaching staff in secondary schools is such that those who qualify on the three-year criteria mentioned above were relatively few.

In addition to the school-based interviews, leading members of the Ministry of Education headquarters, (hereinafter referred to as ‘Ministry based SIP leaders’) who had been or were still involved in the promotion and development of the SIP, were also interviewed. This was to provide the policy- oriented perspective of the programme, in contrast to the views of the schools. Two of them were among the main initiators of the programme originally; two others were leading its implementation in schools and the last two were members of the Ministry based support team to the SIP, with responsibility for support to secondary schools. All six respondents were female.

Documents

Documents were purposively sampled for their relevance to the enquiry (Fogelman, 2002). They were representative of the documents relating directly to school improvement issues in secondary schools, to the extent that all schools are required to maintain such plans and records of school improvement initiatives. As Fogelman (ibid: 98) points out, representativeness allows the researcher to ‘be reasonably confident about the validity of whatever generalisations we make’.

In January 2006 all state schools began a new three-year development planning cycle. Documents related to this and to previous development plans were examined, namely the schools’ development plans of the past two planning cycles, spanning a six-year period from 2000 to 2005. Other documents studied were: the schools’ own evaluation reports of their previous two development plans; the external evaluation reports of the Quality Assurance Section; the schools’ professional development plans for the period 2000 to 2005; SI co-

ordinators' progress reports and a purposive sample of the minutes of SIT meetings of each of the four schools, based on the numbers available and the relevance of the content to the targets set in the plans. The external evaluation reports of the Quality Assurance Unit of the Ministry were included because they provide comparable evidence for the investigation, and they attempt to do that from an outsider's perspective.

Observation of meetings

The frequency of meetings of the SIT depended mainly on the stage of planning reached by each school and the commitment of team members. On average the SITs met six times a term, but possibly more often at the start of the planning cycle. Considering the researcher's limitations of time it was expedient to carry out the observation of meetings while she was in the school doing interviews, as far as was possible. This was done with a view to enhancing the possibilities for triangulation. However, two meetings were the most that could be handled in the time available and in view of the purposes of the observation (stated above), this was judged appropriate.

Research instruments and Piloting

The interview schedule comprises questions developed from the original research questions, relating to the four main aspects of the school improvement process adopted by Seychelles schools, namely: the school's vision, the development planning process, professional development and leadership. (See Appendix 1a). The questions range from the more general to specific issues, with the possibility of probing further if necessary. They aim to engage the respondents in giving a

reflective account of their perceptions of the school improvement process in their schools, and their involvement in it. The schedule used with the Ministry based SIP leaders enquires about the same aspects as above but a few modifications were made to suit this category of respondents (see Appendix 1b).

The interview questions were piloted amongst three middle level leaders from schools who were following a masters degree programme at the local teacher training institution, and one Ministry based SIP leader. They had all been involved with the implementation of the SIP in their schools and at the Ministry respectively, and they were very familiar with the issues raised in the interview. In addition, all research instruments were tested in Capucin School, the first school to be studied, and which was used as the pilot school. The observation schedule was also piloted in the first meeting observed in the pilot school and some minor adjustments were made.

Piloting of research instruments serves to evaluate the effectiveness of the instruments in order to ensure greater validity and reliability (Cohen et al, 2000). It is necessary to obtain feedback on the clarity, the validity and general quality of the instruments, prior to the actual fieldwork, in order to ensure that they can achieve their purpose. Especially in the cases of interviews and observation, there is always the possibility of bias. Piloting also gives an indication of the amount of time it takes to administer the instruments, and the feasibility of the whole enterprise.

Another reason for piloting, as Bell (2002) points out, is the guidance it can provide in determining the process and method of analysis afterwards. Piloting

should help the researcher in deciding on the methods of recording and analysing the data. Moyles (2002) also considers piloting as a means of training for the researcher.

Validity, reliability and triangulation

A number of measures have been taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the research. Whilst it is acknowledged that these concepts, having originated from quantitative research approaches, may not apply in the same way to qualitative methods such as case studies, it remains important to address the issue of the authenticity and reliability of the research (Bush, 2002; Brocke-Utne, 1996).

Validity

Cohen et al (2000: 105) observe that validity ‘should be seen as a matter of degree rather than as an absolute state’, and note that there are many different kinds of validity. Yin (2003: 33), proposes four tests that should be ‘used to establish the quality of any empirical social research’. He defines these tests and their related concepts as follows (Yin, 1994: 143 – 144):

- *construct validity*: establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied;
- *internal validity*: ... establishing a causal relationship, whereby certain conditions are shown to lead to other conditions, as distinguished from spurious relationships;
- *external validity*: establishing the domain to which a study’s findings can be generalised; and
- *reliability*: demonstrating that the operations of a study – such as the data collection procedures – can be repeated with the same results.

(original italics)

These four tests were applied, as far as was possible, in the design and execution of this research project. The ‘operational measures for the concepts being studied’ relate to the standards of school improvement established by the SIP, which was instituted in all schools ten years ago. Changes that may have occurred as a result

of the programme, within the major domains targeted – i.e. working towards achieving the school's vision, development planning, promoting staff's professional development and leadership development – were judged against these established standards. They were also considered in line with conditions and processes that prevail in a SIDS, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Construct validity was addressed through the use of 'multiple sources of evidence' (Yin, *ibid*: 144) which brought together data from interviews with school personnel as well as with Ministry based SIP leaders, observation of SIT meetings and analysis of relevant documents. This form of triangulation, in the words of Cohen et al (2000: 112), 'attempt[s] to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint'.

Internal validity is also described by Brocke-Utne (1996: 143) as 'how correctly the researcher portrays the phenomenon it is supposed to portray', while Cohen et al (2000: 107) explain that it 'seeks to demonstrate that the explanation of a particular event, issue or set of data which a piece of research provides can accurately be sustained by the data.' In this enquiry the use of multiple data collection methods and emphasis on portraying each sampled school from different perspectives, should to a large extent, ensure internal validity. Furthermore, the questions used in the semi-structured interviews and the content of the observation schedule were carefully worded and communicated to participants in the research, in order to capture *their* perceptions of the issues under investigation, as far as possible. All interview transcripts were first verified

by interviewees before they were used in the analysis. The documentary analysis also involved comparison of patterns which emerged in the course of the investigation (Yin, 1994).

‘External validity refers to the degree to which the results can be generalised to the wider population, cases or situations’ (Cohen et al, 2000: 109). The question of generalisability remains a contentious issue in case study research and, as discussed earlier in this chapter, various strategies for dealing with it have been proposed thus far (see Bassey, 1999; Hammersley, 2001; Yin, 2003). For the purposes of this research, Yin’s (ibid) notion of analytical generalisation was used to address the issue.

Reliability

Cohen et al (2000: 120) argue that there are fundamental differences in the criteria for reliability in quantitative methodologies compared to those used in qualitative methodologies:

In qualitative methodologies reliability includes fidelity to real life, context and situation-specificity, authenticity, comprehensiveness, detail, honesty, depth of response and meaningfulness to the respondents.

Bush (2002: 60) elaborates further on definitions of the concept of reliability: ‘the probability that repeating a research procedure or method would produce identical or similar results.’ Yin (2003: 38) suggests that ‘one prerequisite for allowing [an] investigator to repeat an earlier case study is to document the procedures followed in the earlier case.’

Such procedures were followed in this investigation and all instruments used in this research are included in the appendices. All procedures that have been adopted and followed are explained in this chapter. The use of multiple sources of data should further strengthen the reliability of the research as well as portray the different realities of the various groups of people involved. However, as Bush (2002: 63) points out with regard to semi-structured interviews:

It is more difficult to ensure reliability using unstructured or semi-structured interviews because of the deliberate strategy of treating each participant as a potentially unique respondent.

This researcher has tried to minimise this problem by treating the first case study school as a pilot case and has documented all prompts added to the main questions of the interview. These were then cross-checked with the subsequent schools involved in the study, and recorded. Additional prompts were kept to a minimum.

With regard to observation of meetings, the same observation schedule was used in all meetings for all the schools. Specificities related to the type of meeting being held were also noted. But as Brocke-Utne (1996:615) notes: ‘any observation, of whatever type, contains errors of measurement.’

Documentary analysis according to Robson (1994:243) lends itself well to the test of reliability: ‘The data are in permanent form and hence can be subject to re-analysis, allowing reliability checks and replication studies’. The documents that were analysed were available for re-analysis where this was considered to be necessary and most of them were officially accessible to researchers. The highly

centralised nature of the system, to a large extent, ensured that the range of documents analysed were easily comparable.

While every effort was made, within the context of this research project, to ensure the validity and reliability of the data, it is acknowledged that the application of these concepts to case study research remains problematic, as has been discussed above and has been pointed out by several other researchers (eg. Bush, 2002; Cohen et al, 2000; Bassey, 1999). Bassey (ibid) goes on to suggest, as an alternative, the notion of ‘trustworthiness’, which he adapts from Lincoln and Guba (1985). With respect to data collection, he posits that the answers to the following three questions should help to determine the extent of trustworthiness:

1. Has there been prolonged engagement with data sources?
2. Has there been persistent observation of emerging issues?
3. Have raw data been adequately checked with their sources?

(Bassey, 1999: 75)

And in relation to analysis of raw data, he asks this question:

4. Has there been sufficient triangulation of raw data leading to analytical statements?

The above questions were also taken into consideration in the data collection process of this research project.

Triangulation

Bush (2002: 68) defines triangulation as the comparison of ‘many sources of evidence in order to determine the accuracy of information or phenomena. It is essentially a means of cross-checking data to establish its validity’. The use of

triangular techniques, especially in qualitative research, is, according to Cohen et al (2000: 112), 'a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity'. Bush (2002) however is more cautious, pointing out that while triangulation does contribute to validity, it is not a panacea. Consequently, in view that this research project involves the study of the complexity and richness of human behaviour (Cohen et al, *ibid*), it is important to consider the phenomena from more than one standpoint.

Bush (*ibid*: 68) proposes two main types of triangulation: methodological and respondent triangulation. Methodological triangulation involves the use of 'several methods to explore the same issue' while respondent triangulation is concerned with 'asking the same questions of many different participants'. In this study both types of triangulation were used. Methodological triangulation was achieved through using interviews, documentary analysis and observation of SIT meetings. It enabled the researcher to compare the outcomes of each method in order to validate, as far as possible, the outcomes of each.

Respondent triangulation was done by interviewing different groups of persons concerned with the school improvement programme, namely staff who were members of the SIT, staff who were not, as well as Ministry based SIP leaders. In this way it should be possible 'to respond to the multiplicity of perspectives present in a social situation' (Adelman et al, 1984: 98).

Data collection

The researcher spent between one and three weeks in each case study school, over the period of August 2005 to April 2006, for the purposes of analysing relevant school based documents, interviewing the selected members of staff and observing the agreed meetings. Access to schools and to relevant school-based documents was very easy to obtain, as the system is very small and the researcher is known by all school managers. While such negotiations were done on a personal level, and often with colleagues, it was important to ensure that all ethical considerations were taken into account and respected with regard to people and documents.

Documents from the schools were analysed in situ, whereas those held at the Ministry of Education were borrowed for short periods. The meetings attended were determined on the basis of the stated criteria (given above) and was negotiated with the headteacher, in agreement with the chair of the SIT where this was not the head. Interviews were conducted according to an agreed schedule, discussed with the management of the school and the members of staff concerned. The interviews took place in school offices designated by the school management, and in complete privacy. Four teachers from two schools opted to be interviewed on the staffroom balconies, which were unoccupied and quiet all through the interviews. On average each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes.

Data from the interviews were written down in detailed notes, which were transcribed immediately after each interview. Within a week of the interviews, the transcriptions were returned to each respondent for verification, by the researcher

personally. Transcripts were modified in accordance with the respondents' comments, as necessary. (An example of the interview transcripts is shown in Appendix 1c). In general very few modifications needed to be made. Field notes from the observations of meetings were kept, based on the areas contained in the observation schedule. The notes were expanded immediately after each meeting into the form of a report.

Data analysis

The data from each case study school was analysed separately and the views of teachers, SIT members and the school's management team was compared in order to obtain various perceptions of the school improvement process and outcomes. Data from the observation of SIT meetings contributed to these perceptions from another angle. The views of the Ministry based SIP leaders were treated as a separate data set and the results were also compared with the various perceptions of school staff.

Data from the documentary analysis allowed the researcher to deduce the extent to which the schools' stated development plans were implemented and targets achieved, both from the point of view of the school and that of the quality assurance service of the Ministry of Education.

Finally, the findings from the five case study schools are compared and contrasted on the basis of the four major areas for school improvement – namely the schools' visions, development planning, professional development and leadership – as highlighted in the research questions.

Ethical Issues

‘Researchers have a duty to avoid causing harm to participants and to the socio-political environments in which and with which they work’ (Busher, 2002: 83).

While it may be difficult to anticipate the kind of harm that may be caused through research occurring in a wide range of contexts, it is incumbent upon the researcher to minimise the harm that could be done to participants. Harm, according to Busher (ibid), ‘includes psychological pressure as well as physical danger.’ Cohen et al (2000: 49) point to the need to strike a balance between the researchers’ commitment to ‘the pursuit of truth, and their subjects’ rights and values potentially threatened by the research.’ They further argue that each research undertaking is a unique event

and the conduct of researchers cannot be, indeed should not be, forced into a procrustean system of ethics. When it comes to the resolution of a specific moral problem, each situation frequently offers a spectrum of possibilities (Cohen et al, ibid: 50).

In this research the participants were teachers, middle managers and leaders of secondary schools as well as support and senior management personnel of the Ministry of Education, in a small school system characterised by a highly personalised level of interaction generally. Almost all the respondents were personally known to the researcher, and many of them were already aware of her research project prior to her approaching them individually. In such circumstances, and where a certain degree of professional trust already exists (Bell, 1994), it was relatively easy to seek the participants’ informed consent and to discuss with them openly the possibilities of avoiding bias. However, over-familiarity with the participants - at least those who had been the researcher’s

working colleagues with regard to the SIP – can also attract the danger of both parties being familiar with each other's views on various aspects of education, which may colour to some extent their responses to some of the interview questions. It is hoped that the process of triangulation as well as that of piloting the interviews, which had been done with people known to the researcher as well, would have eliminated some of the possibilities for bias (Moyles, 2002).

It was considered especially important to obtain participants' informed consent as the size of the education system makes it difficult to maintain the anonymity of respondents and schools. This was done through the following strategies:

- providing detailed explanations of the purpose of the research and of the procedures to be followed;
- the offer to answer any further enquiries about the research and the procedures being used;
- negotiated agreement on the best time and place for the interviews;
- the option for the participant to withdraw from the project at any time, without prejudice to herself/ himself.

In addition participants were assured of confidentiality with regard to all information provided through the interviews. These were not shared with any other person. Respondents and the schools they came from were not named at any point in the reports of the research. Where it was necessary to cite particular cases pseudonyms were used throughout. Interview transcripts were taken back to each respondent for verification and these were later collected from the respondents by the researcher personally.

Despite these precautions, it is acknowledged that education ‘insiders’ would be able to make informed guesses about the schools and participants, within such a small system. The author made every effort to minimise this problem through the procedures mentioned above.

Summary

The research methodology employed in this enquiry is qualitative in nature and uses the case study as the main approach. This should reflect the richness of the data and allow for multiple perspectives of the phenomenon. The choice of three different types of research tools – documentary analysis, interviews and observation - should increase the reliability and validity of the data. The chapter also discusses the procedures that were followed to ensure the reliability, validity and trustworthiness of the data collected. The question of research ethics is considered, and the processes and techniques for data analysis are briefly discussed.

The next five chapters present data from the interviews of the Ministry based SIP leaders and from the four case study schools, focusing on the four aspects of school improvement being studied in this research project, namely the school’s stated vision, the process of development planning, school-based professional development and leadership in the schools.

Chapter Four: Perceptions of Ministry based SIP leaders

Introduction

The views of six persons closely involved with the SIP were sought, as a means of providing an overview of the programme from the perspective of Ministry of Education staff. They were selected on the basis of purposive sampling, in view of the fact that they were the ones most directly involved with the establishment and the implementation of the programme in schools. In the interest of anonymity and confidentiality, the respondents have been labelled A to F.

The interviews followed a similar format to the ones for school personnel and they all took place within the month of January 2006. Participants were asked about the schools' visions, and in particular the factors that may influence the attainment of the visions; the development planning process, the implementation and level of success of the development plans; school based professional development, and leadership issues. The questions were directed at the school system generally, although emphasis was placed on secondary schools whenever examples were requested. The two support persons interviewed referred largely to their experiences with secondary schools.

Schools' visions

A, B, C and F enumerated a number of factors which they felt had influenced the way schools had set and were working towards the attainment of their visions. A and B highlighted the training of school leaders as well as the school based staff development activities of each school. All four also mentioned, in the words of A,

‘the changing landscape of schools’ which included new school management structures instituted over the past six years, the greater involvement of parents in school life and the increased pace of change in education. C felt that over the last three planning cycles schools had moved from ‘adapting ideas from the visions of other schools from other systems’ to developing their own versions; it was now possible to see that ‘the visions are linked with the plans, the priorities and the targets’ (C).

D, however, thought that the schools’ visions tended ‘to be more concerned with establishing the right atmosphere, a conducive environment for learning and the conditions that would bring these about’, without focussing on what was actually happening in the classroom. E, taking a broader view of the issues involved, pointed to ‘the impact of the Ministry on schools’. She believed that schools were ‘always trying to anticipate what the Ministry expect(ed) of them’ and as a result found it difficult ‘to articulate their own vision’. She also stated that ‘they needed to live’ the visions they had established, a process that, in her view, had not yet happened, and which depended largely on the leadership qualities existing in schools and the leaders’ ability to link up with the community and build commitment to the vision.

The participants also gave their views on the extent to which the schools’ visions had influenced the way people in the schools worked. Two thirds of the group (B, C, D, E) noted that it did, or that it should, at least ‘at the beginning of the development planning process’ (C). E thought that ‘having a vision had led to a good deal of team work and discussions in schools’ while B felt that the vision had ‘helped everyone to focus’. C and E also mentioned that the vision statements were often visible in the schools, usually displayed on the notice boards. B, C, D and E

felt that the visions had the potential to significantly influence the school plans, but they also acknowledged that the reality fell far short of the intentions. C, D and E noted that references to the schools' visions were often not made once the development planning exercise had taken place: 'it is just left' (D); 'they tend not to refer to the visions again afterwards, in the implementation stages' (C). E was more emphatic about what should happen:

Since the vision is long term, there should be consistency within and between the plans, advocating actions that lead towards achieving the vision. Again, this depends a lot on the leadership.

B thought it was more a matter of teachers' attitudes. For many teachers in secondary schools the adoption of development planning had not resulted in the expected shift to more positive attitudes. She added that the shortages of some basic resources 'also have an effect on people's sense of commitment'.

A and F seemed to consider vision building within broader perspectives related to the effects of the SIP. A explained that the fact that the schools' visions 'were being worked out together with teachers,' they had ownership of them and this led teachers 'to feel they (were) part of the process of development planning'. She thought that the process of consultation involved in establishing their visions had 'brought them closer to others in the education process'. F seemed to take a more idealistic view of the situation:

Having a vision has helped to get people to develop and work towards common goals; it has provided a clearer picture of the directions they wish to take; it has influenced the way school management organise themselves; it has strengthened the capacity of school management, having forced them, in a way, to reconsider the way they functioned. Instead of just coping and generally administering, they've had to think differently and find other ways of doing things. This in turn has got teachers to interact more with one another, working more collaboratively; there is greater collegiality, and more teamwork.

Only the last point made here was confirmed by all interviewees in the group, who agreed that teachers worked together more readily and discussed their teaching more openly.

Development Planning

The interview questions in this section focused on the effectiveness of the development planning process in schools, the changes that had taken place and improvements that may be linked to it. Respondents were also asked for their perceptions of how the process of development planning in schools might evolve over time.

Effectiveness of Development Planning

Respondents had somewhat divergent views regarding the extent to which the development planning process had been effective in the schools. C, D and F believed that now, ten years into the school improvement programme, ‘the shift has been made to more practice-based concepts and process’ (C), with schools growing in confidence in the use of the development planning process (D and F). E noted that it had ‘given them a focus, and clearer targets to work towards’, while F went further, pointing out that the shift had become deep rooted enough to lessen the impact of a possible loss of momentum resulting from staff transfers:

It has provided them with a framework for looking at themselves critically and in a systematic way; there is ownership of the plans they develop, and the confidence management has developed over time allows new teams to take on another team’s plans without too many problems, as in the case of transfers.

This was not a view shared by any of the others. A’s and E’s responses, in particular, reflected the views of the others:

I think development planning has taken root in most primary schools, but not in secondary. Yet this is where the better trained people are, and we would have expected them to better understand the process. But that is not the case: there seems to be a tug of war between the senior and middle managers; they seem to find it difficult to work with each other. (A)

There is more emphasis on teaching and learning, as well as an awareness of other issues such as the school ethos and culture. However, there is still a need for them to really understand the process and making it their own. At the moment they are responding to tasks set by the Ministry but they have not internalised the process. (E)

B, C and D also expressed concern about the capacities of schools to implement the plans they developed. B thought that the problems of implementation were related to ‘the commitment of individuals involved’ whereas C saw the problems more in terms of translating the planned targets into meaningful actions in the classroom: ‘There is still some difficulty for people to link what they do in the classroom everyday to what had been put in the development plan some time previously’.

Changes and improvements linked to development planning

Several positive changes were noted by all interviewees. They all mentioned that the plans had provided schools with a means of focusing on specific aspects of school life they wished to change. They also agreed that there was greater involvement of staff in school activities, which according to A, C, D and F, had resulted in attitude changes amongst teachers as well as at management level. Respondent A thought that, in several schools, the management teams had changed the way they worked, without specifying exactly in what ways, and added that teachers had also changed their perceptions: ‘they are more willing to open their classroom doors to others; there’s more team planning and peer teaching’ (A). C noted the adoption of the development planning process by school management, evidenced by their ability to carry out the process independently, and seeking help of their own accord: ‘we always had to go after them in previous times’. She also

referred to the greater openness amongst school personnel: ‘generally people are more open and discussions of a more critical nature take place about teaching and learning’. D mentioned the improved action planning process that was happening at department levels, and commented that the development plans had ‘brought people to think in terms of the realities of their schools – especially the strengths and weaknesses of the schools’. This was a point also made by F who thought that the school auditing process had led schools to find internal solutions to the problems they perceived as being ‘directly linked to the realities of the school’. F also believed the management of schools had improved, giving as an example ‘the greater involvement of parents and the community’.

B and E highlighted examples of improvements in other areas as well: ‘schools have clearer school-based policies’ (B) and, according to E, ‘there is more monitoring... they (teachers and managers) keep better records of various kinds, including those of evaluations of students’ learning’. E also mentioned instances of networking between schools and, along with C, noted that there were more opportunities for teachers to exercise leadership: ‘for example we’ve discovered various talents in leadership amongst the PDFs’ (E).

Two respondents referred to student achievements in their comments on the effects of development planning. A mentioned ‘improvements in student outcomes, as evidenced by the results of national exams in certain areas’ while C considered improvements in students’ achievements in terms of teachers concerns:

While they (teachers) do tend to blame students for under-achievements, the concern to find solutions through changing the teaching strategies suggests that they know the problems may also be related to their teaching, but this will not be admitted openly.

Teachers' reluctance to engage in 'reflective practice' (C) was also alluded to by F who felt that there had been only 'some slight changes in the way that teachers work'. She suggested that generally teachers tended to see 'the whole idea of school improvement ... as additional pressure on them' and hence the need for continuous monitoring. 'In those schools where teacher appraisal is linked to achievement targets, the process (of development planning) is managed more effectively' (F).

Difficulties involved in the implementation and management of the development plans were mentioned by three respondents. C gave the following example:

It seems the need to be pushed from behind by us, by the Ministry, always remains. An initiative is started by a school, for example, four secondary schools started doing some academic networking with feeder primary schools, with the assistance of the school improvement co-ordinator, but when she had to withdraw only one managed to sustain the initiative.

B referred to leaders' difficulties in transforming new learning into school-based practice:

Take for example the concerns related to pastoral care. Several heads who have been through the MBA course have done a lot of work, including their dissertations, on the subject. So you would expect they are well-researched and well informed. And yet in the schools, these are the very ones who seem unable to put much of what they have learnt into practice. It is difficult to put a finger on what the problem really is in such instances.

D believed that the development plan should be the main focus of the school, 'the guiding document in the school's development', but she noted that so often the school management teams were unable to maintain this focus: 'other things happen, demands coming from the outside overwhelm them and all this takes away the emphasis from the plan'.

Evolution of the development planning process

A, B, C and D pointed out that changes had already taken place with regard to the content, time frame and implementation of the plans. Respondent A thought that the content as well as the implementation processes were continually improving; B and D agreed that there was a ‘better understanding of the planning process’ and SI teams were optimising on the time available for producing the plans, but they maintained that ‘the implementation of the plans remained a problem’. C was more concerned with the procedures that had evolved in the production of the plan. She explained that presently PDFs and two members of the SIT networked with other schools before a first draft of the plans were drawn up, in order to draw on common experiences. SIT members also shared the work of writing up the plans amongst themselves to prevent overloading.

E and F took a more global view of how the SIP might evolve, especially, they noted, in view of extensive training that was taking place in education leadership. E hoped that eventually schools would ‘have more flexibility to develop their own model for development planning and their own time frame’, while F foresaw the possibility of schools taking ‘more responsibility for the whole process’:

for instance a school could decide to do a five-year plan; to be more flexible in the way they organise professional development activities; to go faster with their plans, provided they are ready to take on innovations.

The note of caution at the end of this statement is not shared by E who felt that there were other issues involved, such as expectations of accountability and changes in the Ministry’s funding arrangements:

There is also a need for them (the schools) to become more accountable, but this needs to be linked to Ministry mechanisms that demand accountability. If the Ministry approves the plans then there needs to be a certain obligation for the provision of the necessary funding, and this in turn has to be accounted for at the end. The links between the plans, finance and QA need to be firmly established.

Professional Development

In this section respondents were asked for their views on the impact of professional development (PD) activities on school life generally, as well as the impact on teachers' thinking and practice more specifically. They also discussed the level of teachers' acceptance of school-based PD activities and alternatives to the present system.

The impact of PD on schools and teachers

All participants thought that PD activities had had some positive impact on school life, 'to varying degrees in different schools,' in the words of F. Four of them, A, C, E and F, cited increased teamwork and a greater openness among teachers, while D mentioned a broadening of knowledge for many teachers. E also expressed the view that 'people have come to depend on themselves, they make more use of their own resources, although there is still not much in terms of 'exchange' of resources between schools'.

Resource development was an aspect of PD that was noted by three respondents, A, C and F; they had observed instances where teachers had engaged in the development of materials for specific groups of students, during PD sessions, and the teachers had then tried out and evaluated the effectiveness of the materials. Nonetheless, all respondents felt that PD activities had had limited impact on teaching and learning. Reactions ranged from almost no impact at all (B) to some changes in teachers' attitudes (A, E, C and F) and the need to measure the impact properly (E):

Teachers seem to take what is given (in PD) but they then seem to leave it all behind in the training room when they leave (B).

In terms of attitude: more people are working together, for example teachers who are working on supplementary materials, on assessment, who are engaged in team planning, in the use of more innovative teaching strategies (A).

Attitudes (have changed), yes; teachers are more open about what they do, they allow others into their classrooms. They keep records of targets they are working towards. In some schools students are also made to set personal targets, but these are not regularly monitored (E).

In other sessions there have been opportunities for frank discussions, to the point where staff have challenged the management (C).

It (the impact on teaching and learning) hasn't been measured. There are also differences between primary and secondary schools. In some primary schools it is possible to see closer connections between PD and changes in classroom practice, but in secondary, as it is organised differently, it is more difficult to see (E).

Differences in the impact of PD between primary and secondary schools was also noted by A, and she agreed with E that the problem lies with a lack of monitoring at department level: 'departments could do more monitoring, could get involved in subject development, even in better marketing the work they do' (A).

Acceptance of PD in schools

All respondents felt that time-tabled PD activities had become an accepted part of school life, although four of them noted that there were reservations still on the part of some teachers. C thought that resistance tended to come from middle level leaders who 'seem(ed) to be unwilling to fully take on responsibility for teaching and learning and so teachers slacken(ed) up as well,' whereas D saw it coming from 'the few who will keep on complaining'. A felt that nevertheless 'the fact that it (was) time-tabled and the plans (were) developed as per school needs (had) helped in getting PD institutionalised' but F conceded that 'there may be reservations about

timing and organisation, but the idea is accepted.’ However, E had other reservations on the matter of acceptance: ‘The fact that it’s been almost forced on them has meant it’s been sustained, but it is still difficult to gauge the impact it may have on teaching and learning’.

Possible alternative modes of PD

On the issue of alternatives to the mandatory weekly PD sessions, participants had diverse opinions. C, E and F thought that schools ‘could be given more flexibility to decide how best they could organise PD for themselves’ (E), although F was more cautious, saying that ‘*eventually* (researcher’s italics) it could certainly be done differently’. C was more categorical:

The timing is wrong. The one and a half hours per week we have at the moment results in training that is fragmented. And so much preparation has to go into each weekly session that lasts such a short time. Personally, I think it would be better to have, say, a PD day per term, or two half days; it would be easier to plan, we would get more done and the whole thing would be more efficient in terms of time.

F also thought that PD sessions did not have to be held weekly; ‘a school could plan for one or two PD days per term, depending on the activities they want to do’.

All respondents suggested alternative ways of offering PD in schools, where the timing would be left at the discretion of the school. B envisaged the possibility of schools grouping themselves together regionally, or simply on the basis of interest, and organising joint activities. This could also involve the teacher trainers of the National Institute of Education (NIE) and the sessions could last longer: ‘Schools could also plan longer sessions during the holidays, or in collaboration with the NIE on specific areas of need’ (B). F proposed a wider choice of activities and also

emphasised the role of the NIE in PD, seeing them as facilitators in the provision of a range of PD activities:

we could consider a scenario where teachers could have a choice of sessions and they would select the ones that best suited them, according to their needs, as identified by themselves and their schools. It would be a matter of teachers saying to themselves: 'I need this to improve my practice and so I'll attend'. Such PD sessions could be organised by schools or the NIE, depending on the resources and logistics.

F, like B and A, also commented on the importance of schools making more use of school based resource persons as facilitators of PD: 'it would also be good for school based resource persons to actually come forward and offer their expertise as a contribution to PD' (F).

D and E took a broader and more integrated view of PD, seeing it as activities that would become 'embedded into the normal functioning of the school' (D) and that 'should permeate the whole school, and (should be) done through team work and peer work' (E). D elaborated on this point:

It should be ...built into the culture of the school, linked to all activities appropriate to development planning. It should be something that happens continuously, in flexible and different forms, such as through school-based training, networking activities, shared experiences.

E, while advocating similar developments, acknowledged the difficulties in 'accrediting the gains from PD activities so that they may contribute to eventual formal qualifications'. She also alluded to 'the possible conflict between PD for personal growth and that for school growth which needs to be addressed'.

C and A thought that certain changes had already happened in the way PD took place in schools. C cited the examples of centrally organised training of heads of departments (HoDs) to help them better assume their roles; and the current 'training of trainers' programme for PDFs, to assist them in responding to staff needs as

identified through analyses of schools' evaluation plans. She referred to a recent training programme that dealt with addressing teachers' responsibilities vis-à-vis pastoral care: 'in a way this training is being orchestrated centrally but the sessions are being led by PDFs and organised at school level'. Respondent A noted changes at the level of the school, where PD activities were often organised at the level of small groups – departmental or subject based – rather than involving whole school groups as had been the case in earlier years of the SIP. She also anticipated that PD sessions could be 'more teacher led, rather than relying heavily on the PDFs and management teams' and that they would become more practical 'with teachers doing and learning in the process – making it easier for them to translate learning into practice later on'.

Perceptions of Leadership

This section presents the respondents' views on the actual leadership styles in secondary schools; the extent of participative decision-making and factors that may inhibit this process; and finally the possible effects of smallness and personalised working relationships on the SIP.

Actual leadership styles

The actual situation, as noted by C and echoed by D, F, and A to some extent, reflected a predominance of an authoritarian style of leadership in most of the ten secondary schools. F stated that there was 'a tendency towards the authoritarian style of leadership in many of our schools,' while A tempered this down to 'a mix between participatory and autocratic'. They speculated on the possible reasons for this:

Perhaps our managers are scared of losing their authority or they are not confident about how to get teachers involved. The relationship between the management and the teachers is not always smooth or sympathetic. (F)

We also have to acknowledge that they are at a transitory stage right now. It takes time to change people's mindsets, outlooks and attitudes. We can't expect miracles in spite of the MBA training. But we do expect them to evolve, to change over time and develop into effective managers. (A)

E was more explicit as to the reasons why the anticipated change had not occurred:

They are managers, administrators who can keep the schools ticking over. They tend to be more concerned with maintaining discipline, good order, not upsetting the Ministry. They're also rather scared of their own staff; they are not confident to manage their staff, often feeling intimidated by them, and so they hide behind the authoritarian style of leadership, unable to let go.

D pointed to another dimension of the actual situation, referring mainly to headteachers; she believed that while there were two or three authoritarian heads, the rest were 'laissez-faire':

They are not firm enough, they find it difficult to get their staff to conform; they are a bit ahead of their staff but still do not have what it takes to lead effectively. Sometimes the DHCs (deputy heads for curriculum) have a more balanced approach than the head.

This view is partly confirmed by B, who also considered the problem as one of accountability:

They (headteachers) do consult others, and delegate quite a bit, but then when results do not happen they don't follow on, they don't insist on holding people accountable. Instead the work is passed on to the small group on whom they think they can rely and so the others get away with not doing their share.

The extent of participative decision-making

B, along with C, D and E, maintained that there was more participative decision-making than there used to be in the past. They felt, together with A, that this was partly due to the fact that structures and mechanisms to facilitate consultation and participation were in place, and were being used effectively to a certain extent:

The structures are in place to make this happen. Heads often meet with HoDs and HoYs, and a lot of discussion takes place, but not everyone participates. (B)

All the structures and mechanisms are there to make it happen. But it depends largely on the individual heads as to how to get their people involved. (A)

The main dissenting voice here was F who felt that participation in the process of decision-making was limited, and was 'not yet at a satisfactory level'. She gave a possible reason for this: 'The blame syndrome is still quite strong; the management blames teachers or the Ministry for what goes wrong and vice versa. The teachers in return blame the students and parents'.

F, A, C and B also identified the heads' reluctance to accept ultimate responsibility for leadership as one of the factors that may inhibit staff participation in decision-making. F considered this in relation to the 'blame syndrome' she believed prevailed in schools:

As long as heads distance themselves from decisions for which they must ultimately take responsibility, their relationship with staff will be affected. In many instances they keep stepping aside, and they place the responsibility on the Ministry for certain decisions which teachers then feel are being imposed on them. They retain or pass on information as they see fit, not necessarily with a view to keeping people well informed but to play power games.

Power relations and the retention of power were also alluded to by A, C and B. Respondent A noted that school managers 'may not be willing to let go of their powers' and as a consequence were sometimes reluctant 'to get their people involved'. C associated the need to hold on to power with 'the authoritarian style of leadership' and referred to the difficulties of staff who dared challenge the management's authority: 'Those who dare challenge the management may be reprimanded publicly, sometimes in the PD sessions or in meetings'. B saw the

dominant personalities of heads as being sometimes problematic: ‘they may not tolerate being questioned and so people become passive’.

A number of other inhibitive factors, relating mainly to staff’s attitudes, were cited by E, A, B and D. These included a culture of passivity encouraged by centralised decision making processes and political interference, a fear that accepting additional responsibilities would simply bring on more work, a lack of support for shared leadership at school level, and a lack of trust generally.

Often they don’t expect to be consulted, or they take the passive stance, assuming that consultation is useless because decisions have been made anyway, or because they see it as bringing about more work. ...they don’t trust each other and they maintain an isolationist culture. This is encouraged by the fact that politics gets mixed up in all aspects of life, especially people’s working lives. (E)

A and B noted teachers’ unwillingness ‘to take on other responsibilities’ because of a reluctance ‘to take risks and to try out things’ (B). D proposed further reasons for such reluctance:

Sometimes people feel what they suggest, through the normal consultative process at school level, is not taken into consideration. ...when teachers try to contribute to the activities of the school, they don’t feel supported: the management pins it to an individual rather than portray it as a management decision. People do not always feel trusted, and respect for individual views is not always there.

The effects of smallness

Interviewees were asked to consider the possible effects of smallness (as a small island state community) and personalised working relationships, on the school improvement programme. All respondents agreed that there were positive and negative sides to these issues, but five out of the six referred to negative aspects more extensively than to positive ones.

Half of the group, E, F and C, mentioned problems related to ‘elements of trust’ (E).

E gave the following example:

Everything that happens at school can get to the Ministry within half an hour. Parental pressure can become acute because parents have quick and easy access to the highest authorities of the Ministry, and this undermines the authority of the schools.

F cited a lack of openness about what happens inside the schools because of a ‘certain level of mistrust’.

People still find it difficult to open up and share their successes and failures. The smallness of the system does have an impact, I think; people have a fear of failure, largely because such failures or shortcomings will become widely known so easily, and so the tendency is to play safe. (F)

C pointed to the difficulties of maintaining confidentiality of information as a reason for the lack of openness. She gave the example of staffing allocation to schools, amongst other issues:

Everyone knows before the exercise is done. Everything gets known and can sometimes get distorted as well. So then you are wary about what you’re willing to say and challenge, and this limits the openness that might exist between people.

The view that everything is known, and the likelihood of distortions, was echoed by A, who felt that knowing so much about other people tended towards a focus on the negative views of others; ...‘this can easily colour our perceptions of them. Even when people change, these perceptions often remain and they may hinder changes in people and in the system.’

Another powerful element in maintaining the status quo was noted by D when she talked about people’s aversion to offending others. ‘They try always to be on good terms, because one has to live with the bad feelings.’ She also pointed to relational problems between the management and staff, where teachers are promoted to

management positions, such as heads of department or deputy heads, within the same schools:

They then have problems to gain the respect of the staff or assert their authority because they used to foul-mouth the management along with the other staff, and now they have to demand accountability from the same staff.

On the positive side, E, A and B drew attention to the possibilities of building strong community links, with the potential to develop trusting relationships between parents, teachers and students who knew each other well. E mentioned this with reference to people coming from the same community: ‘teachers who live in the same community as the students may be trusted more by parents;’ and both E and B noted greater opportunities for networking as well. Respondent A thought that ‘knowing people and what makes them tick should help in getting them to get on with things’, while E and B believed that small communities should make it easier ‘to locate resources and expertise’ (E).

Summary

The six Ministry based SIP leaders presented slightly different perceptions of the evolution and effectiveness of the programme. While some noted and all implied that schools were now better able to articulate their visions, half of them observed that schools were still not living the visions. However they all agreed that vision setting had influenced the way people worked in schools, evidenced by the increased incidence of team work and a clearer focus on what schools aimed to achieve.

Schools’ growing confidence in handling the development planning process was noted, but concerns remained with regard to the internalisation of the process.

Schools seemed to constantly face conflicting demands: attempting to fulfil Ministry expectations, while trying to implement plans that required a sustained focus on teaching and learning. It was hoped that eventually schools would have greater flexibility to develop their own models of development planning, and within their own time frames.

The impact of PD on school life was considered to be very positive, and generally teachers' personal learning and team work had improved. While noting teachers' reservations about the mandatory nature of PD activities, the concept had become accepted by the majority of teachers and the process institutionalised. However, all respondents agreed that school-based PD activities had had limited impact on teaching and learning, although the extent of any such impact was still to be measured. Various alternatives to the present PD arrangements were proposed.

All respondents observed that presently, the predominant leadership style in Seychelles schools was authoritarian, with a few which were 'laissez-faire'. Possible reasons were linked to problems of accountability within schools, and between schools and the Ministry, mistrust between school management and staff and perceptions of power relations.

Generally, the effects of smallness were considered in a more negative light than in a positive one. While acknowledging the possibilities of trusting relationships developing between teachers and parents from the same communities, other elements of trust were seen to be problematic because of everything being known and advantage being taken of personalised relationships with people in authority.

Fear of exposing personal weaknesses along with an aversion to offending others were also considered as inhibiting factors in building trusting professional relationships.

The next four chapters present the case studies of the four secondary school investigated through this research. For each school the data is organised on the basis of the four main aspects being studied: the school's vision, development planning, professional development and perceptions of leadership. These are used as main headings in the organisation of the four chapters. For each aspect, data from the documentary analysis, interviews and observations of meetings are presented (always in the same order), compared and discussed.

For the interviews, in the interest of maintaining confidentiality the SIT members have been labelled A to F and non SIT members U to Z. A, B and C are also members of the SMT.

Chapter Five: Case Study 1 – Capucin Secondary School

Introduction

The school is situated in a suburban area of the town of Victoria, (the only town and capital of the country), an area largely made up of housing estates, where most households are in the middle and lower income groups. The surrounding districts are characterised by a high concentration of small and medium sized industries, shops, garages, a few small hotels and guest houses.

In October Capucin School had a student population of 828, with almost equal numbers of boys and girls. There were 63 teaching staff and 26 support staff. The senior management team (SMT) of the school comprised a headteacher, a deputy head responsible for the implementation of the national curriculum (DHC) and a deputy head for pastoral care (DHP). The SMT, along with all the heads of departments (nine in total) and the professional development facilitator (PDF), formed the school's management team. This group also doubled up as the School Improvement Team (SIT). Generally the SMT dealt with issues related to curriculum implementation, the SIP and related matters. The SIT directed and oversaw the implementation of the school's development plan. The SIT was chaired by the headteacher who, prior to becoming the head at the beginning of 2005, had been one of the school's deputy heads for three years.

The sections that follow group together the data collected, based on the four main aspects of the SIP being investigated, through documentary analysis, twelve school-based interviews and observation of two SIT meetings. The interviewees were six

regular teachers who were not members of the SIT and six SIT members who included the head and the two deputies, two Heads of Department (HoDs) and the PDF.

The School's vision

Evidence from the analysis of documents

The vision statement of the school was given at the start of each of the two development plans produced by the school so far (June 1999 – August 2002, and January 2003 – December 2005). It was also displayed on the notice board of the headteacher's office. It refers to providing a broad-based education for every student, with an emphasis on both 'academic and social attainments, in a safe, motivating and supportive environment' (Development Plan, 2003-2005: 4). It proposes to do this through promoting individual student's academic and social achievements, working collaboratively with parents and the wider community, promoting a positive school climate and ethos, and empowering students to develop their talents to the full so that they may become responsible adults (ibid). Generally, links could be discerned between the vision statement and the priorities identified for action and the targets set, but there was no further direct reference to the vision in the rest of the plan, nor in any of the other documents produced by the school, although its existence was implied.

The school's evaluation reports of the development plans suggest that it encountered numerous difficulties in matching its practices and the attitudes of teachers with the aspirations of the vision. Several references were made to the

problems of ‘low ability students’ stuck in the bottom streams and their ‘lack of interest ...in their studies’ (Evaluation Report, 1999), the discipline problems faced by teachers in the lower streamed classes, teachers’ difficulties in keeping control of such classes and in obtaining ‘appropriate resources for low ability students’ (Evaluation Report, 2003).

Similar difficulties were noted in the report of an external evaluation carried out by the Quality Assurance (QA) service of the Ministry of Education in August 2001. The QA team found that in spite of the school’s main priority for that period being ‘bridging the gap’ between higher and lower achieving students, ‘a focus on learning and achievement was not much in evidence in classes in the middle and lower ability range’ (Ministry of Education, 2001: 5). The report (ibid: 8) concluded that the school:

... was geared towards getting the best possible results from the more academic pupils, and a large number of staff had very low expectations of pupils who were in difficulty. Teachers tended to adopt a resigned attitude to the lack of interest shown by pupils of low academic ability at different levels. Many teachers blamed the pupils for their lack of motivation and interest. Few saw it as their responsibility to generate positive attitudes to learning amongst pupils.

In their follow-up report (Ministry of Education, 2003) the QA team found that the school had made some progress in creating a more inclusive and caring ethos, but still faced major challenges in the implementation of behaviour management policies and practices.

Findings from Interviews

The interview questions referred to the respondents’ perceptions of the school’s vision and the ways in which they thought it influenced their practice.

Apart from the headteacher, who pointed to the components of the vision statement on her notice board, the rest of the respondents presented slightly different perceptions of the school's vision. They all acknowledged there was a written vision statement but did not recall the exact elements of it. Two thirds of the group, five SIT members and three non SIT members, said it had to do with developing the child as a whole person, focusing on their academic as well as social, psychological and physical development. C, D, U and V also emphasised the importance of involving parents and other members of the community 'in order that they may achieve their full potential' (D). A, B, X and Y also thought that a sense of community within the school was important.

Only half of the respondents felt that the school's vision influenced the way they and others worked, and then, they explained mainly in the sense that they (meaning staff and students) were aware of the school's stated vision; it did not really inspire their day-to-day work, and it was not present in their everyday thinking. F along with U, W and Y felt they were committed to children's learning anyway, whatever the stated vision of the school; they had no need to be guided by a vision. These general perceptions were also noted by A:

It doesn't seem to have that strong an influence on what they (the staff) do. Even the heads of departments do not always consider the implications of their actions in terms of the kind of vision that is supposed to be guiding us.

However, A and the other five respondents maintained that the vision did influence their work in various and, sometimes, imperceptible ways. Z believed it was necessary to have a vision because it was 'important to work towards a target', while E observed that the school's vision was too vast, trying to tackle too many things at once.

Evidence from observation of SIT meetings

The school's vision featured quite prominently in the first SIT meeting observed, on 14th February 2006. The implementation of the targets contained in the new development plan for 2006 – 2008 were discussed at length, and each department had been directed by the SIT to display the school's vision in a designated area. Almost everyone present reported that it had been done. It had also been decided that departments should organise meetings with students to familiarise them with the vision and the new plan. This had been done by a few departments already and others were planning to do so although no dates had been fixed.

In the second meeting observed the following week, no reference was made to the school's vision and related activities.

Development Planning

The school had gone through two complete development planning and implementation cycles of three years each – from June 1999 to August 2002, and January 2003 to December 2005. A new one was due to start in January 2006. Each plan covers a period of three years, which usually runs from January to December, in line with the school calendar.

This section presents evidence on three aspects of development planning in the school: the process of development planning used; the implementation of the development plans and changes and achievements that may be attributed to development planning in the school.

Evidence from the documentary analysis

The process of development planning

The development plans give some indication of the process followed and there is mention of different groups of people who had been consulted during the development planning process, including students and some non-teaching staff for the first plan. However, they do not specify clearly all the persons involved and the processes used in determining the choice and order of priorities selected. The audit report is very brief and assumes that the reader is already aware of the process used. The key areas examined through the audit correspond to those used in the QA framework, namely 'teaching and learning', 'school management and leadership' and 'pupils' welfare'. According to the Ministry's guidelines (unpublished) this is in order to synchronise the two processes with a view to linking school improvement directly with QA.

Both plans outline their audit results but these are presented in too schematic a format to give a clear understanding of the depth and breadth of information yielded by the audit. Referring to the 1999 plan the QA evaluation report (Ministry of Education, 2001: 11) remarks:

It was difficult to access the deeper levels of information yielded by this audit, however, because of the very summary manner in which it was presented in the School Development Plan.

In both plans, interpretations of the process seemed to have resulted in strategies (especially those selected at departmental level) which were narrow in scope, atomistic in nature, often limited to one year level only and not necessarily

addressing the problems identified. The following examples illustrate this point: tasks related to targets aiming to improve language skills in the 1999 action plans ranged from doing book reviews and giving students more practice in dealing with factual and inferential texts (in English), to French grammar exercises and a thematic study of sports activities. Mathematics dealt with teaching the four basic mathematical operations using the power of ten. Secondary year one was the only group targeted and these activities were to last between one and three terms. The tasks seemed to take no account of the fact that for most students in the targeted group the major problem was a very limited knowledge of the English language, although this had been acknowledged in the audit. Classroom observation carried out by the QA team (first half of July 2001) also confirmed this: ‘in many classes, particularly the ones labelled “low ability”, communication proved to be a major obstacle, partly because of pupils’ poor mastery of language skills’ (ibid: 7). In many instances they found ‘the language used was well beyond the pupils’ ability. Some could hardly read the notes they had copied’ (ibid).

The report further remarked on the lack of connections between the departmental action plans and the priorities of the whole-school plan, and between the plans and the objectives and activities of the professional development plan.

Implementation of Development Planning

The findings in this part of the section on Development Planning are presented in terms of the processes and mechanisms used by the school to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the development plan, and the extent to which the achievements of previous plans were considered and maintained.

The 2001 QA report commented at some length about the lack of focus on the monitoring of the implementation of action plans for the 1999 development plan. The QA team found that although the management of the school ‘had a clear understanding of their roles’ (Ministry of Education, 2001: 6), they spent an inordinate amount of their time dealing with internal disciplinary issues and various other crisis situations. ‘This did not allow members of the team time to maintain a sustained focus on teaching and learning’ (ibid). Similarly, they found that HoDs and other senior staff had ‘well-defined roles in staff supervision and support but in practice, there was little monitoring of teaching and learning taking place’ (ibid: 6).

The monitoring plans by departments

...had been well thought out. However, the roles of different members of the management team in monitoring and evaluation needed to be developed further, in order to give some indication of how the plan would be monitored at whole-school level. (Ibid: 6)

They stated having had sight of ‘a few records of classroom observations... but it was obvious that these were not being carried out consistently enough to have the desired impact’ (ibid). Lesson plans tended to be sketchy and in some instances teachers had none to show. This ‘raises questions about the purpose of monitoring by management, and the usefulness of feedback given to staff on their lesson preparation’ (ibid: 12).

The QA team also found that students were not given enough feedback on their performance, judging from the ‘irregularity of corrections of course work’ and ‘the infrequency of assessment as recorded in the mark books’ (ibid: 8). The same seemed to apply for homework which was ‘not systematically monitored and

followed up in class' (ibid: 8). Students were asked to set targets for themselves at the start of every term, but 'there was no reference to these targets in any of the classes observed, or any other evidence that the targets were being effectively used to motivate pupils.' (Ibid: 9)

The school's evaluation reports (2002, and 2003-2005) also suggest that monitoring of the implementation of the plans remained problematic over the whole period. At the end of 2003 the school's SDP Evaluation Report (2003: 3) stated that:

...the Senior Management is not satisfied with the progress made at department level. There are various reasons. It is mainly due to inadequate and untrained staff members in some cases, inconsistency in keeping up-to-date records.

Minutes of SIT meetings during the implementation of the 2003 - 2005 development plan made very few references to monitoring activities specific to the set targets. There was mention of classroom visits by some HoDs and the DHC in June 2005, but the reports were very brief and only referred to lessons being 'satisfactory' or 'not satisfactory'. Some follow-up visits were reported in October 2005, but again the number of visits and their purposes were not stated.

The QA team's follow-up report of 2003 observed that only limited progress had been made with regard to the implementation of development planning. They noted a greater determination in the school's efforts to monitor teaching and learning more closely, a strong move to develop assessment policies and establish differentiated assessment practices, but it appears that the reality fell short of the school's intentions. The SMT's plan to observe each teacher in the classroom at least twice a term, and to devise a common format for lesson planning did not

happen. The reason given was that they had to provide additional support to new unqualified teachers. From their observation of classroom practice the QA team reported that there was ‘no evidence of planning for mixed ability teaching’ and that ‘differentiated learning activities were not observed in any lesson, including lessons at S1, where students of different abilities were mixed’ (Ministry of Education, 2003: 3). Once again it was recommended that the school should ‘consolidate measures to adapt teaching and learning to students’ needs’ (ibid: 4).

The school’s 2003-2005 evaluation report explained that the target relating to the setting up of an effective monitoring system was not met in 2003, but it was met in 2004 and was maintained in 2005. The only supporting evidence mentioned, however, was that ‘observation sheets/ records had been used at department level, and that records of evaluation had been kept’ (SDP Evaluation Report, 2005: 8-9).

Changes and achievements attributed to development planning

The findings here are considered in terms of the perceived effectiveness of the development planning process and the changes and achievements that may have come about as a result of it.

The effectiveness of the development planning and implementation processes was not commented on directly in any of the school’s evaluation reports. It seemed to be assumed that there are direct links between development planning and school improvement. That is the premise on which the process is established, by both the Ministry and schools. Nevertheless it was possible to deduce from the 2002 and 2005 evaluation reports that the targets of the 1999 plan were not considered to

have been met to the same extent as those set for the 2003-2005 period. In the latter evaluation it is claimed that ‘the overall implementation of the plan was 94% successful’ (SDP Evaluation Report, 2005:15), whereas in the previous report no attempt was made to quantify the level of success. The 2002 evaluation report refers to improvements in the performance of low achievers, in the behaviour of students generally, in time management and parental involvement.

Regarding the five priority areas the school worked on from 2003, their 2005 evaluation report recorded improvements in student behaviour as ‘the school is more peaceful and the environment is more conducive to learning’ (ibid: 15), and ‘remarkable improvement’ (ibid) in the effectiveness of time and classroom management for both teachers and students. For the target aiming to improve the effectiveness of assessment ‘using an appropriate range of approaches’ (ibid:15), the report claimed it ‘was successfully achieved through ‘the implementation of the specification table’ and ‘as a result the evaluation process at school has become more effective’ (ibid:15). The fifth area of focus was improvement of the school’s environment and its physical facilities, the targets for which were also met, according to the report.

However, throughout the report there was little evidence to support the claims being made. Neither were the statements of achievements backed by indicators that may have supported the claims. The narrow focus of most of the targets and success criteria listed, raise questions about the impact the planned actions could have on the performance of students and the functioning of the school. The example of

solving the problems of applying appropriate assessment strategies solely by the introduction of specification tables is a case in point.

The QA evaluation report of 2001 observed that the school showed genuine concern for students who were failing, and the development plan outlined various strategies for narrowing the gap between the performance of the higher and lower ability pupils. However, the strategies ‘were narrow in scope’ and ‘the priorities needed to be worked on simultaneously in order to achieve the desired effect’ (Ministry of Education, 2001: 11). The report also found that ‘school improvement planning did not feature prominently in the agenda of meetings at senior management or departmental levels’ (ibid: 12).

The development planning process, according to the QA follow-up report of 2003, brought departments together and facilitated decisions on common priorities. The QA team reported ‘that school improvement featured more prominently in staff discussions’ (Ministry of Education, 2003: 4), and there was ‘a greater focus on teaching and learning in the monitoring and support activities conducted by departments’ (ibid). Still, they found that ‘school improvement was not deeply embedded in the culture of the school, and several challenges remained’ (ibid). The report added:

Teacher participation in action planning was reported to be unenthusiastic in some departments. Some heads of department themselves questioned the necessity of some of the processes and procedures adopted in development planning (ibid: 4).

The school evaluation report (2003) suggested that obligations to provide cover for absent teachers and other demands made on HoDs to assist with the development of

the national curriculum for schools, limited their ability to fully assume their responsibilities as curriculum leaders in the school.

Findings from Interviews

The process of Development Planning

All respondents agreed that development planning was done according to the established process prescribed by the SIP secretariat at the Ministry and that all teaching staff were consulted at different stages in the process. They also stated that the process was initiated and led by the SIT, which included the SMT and representatives of all the departments. They explained that through departmental and whole school discussions, using the SWOT analysis as the basic tool, areas for improvement were identified, and the SIT then decided on the order of priority in which they were to be addressed.

The six non SIT members tended to place more emphasis on the department level discussions while the SIT members focused more on the leading role of the SIT in the process. However, within the SIT, members who were HoDs linked their input to the process they used in their departments rather than at SIT level, while the SMT members talked about procedures at whole school level. The latter group also tended to gloss over the process, openly acknowledging that the researcher was well aware of the Ministry's prescribed development planning process, and therefore did not need detailed explanations.

E felt that the results of the auditing and target setting procedures were overwhelming, yielding too many targets:

We have too many targets to work on. We have a big problem of discipline, and students' performance has not improved over time. There are a good number of slow learners, there is also boys' under-achievement, all problems that we need to tackle.

W and Y were the only persons who mentioned that students' assessment results were also taken into account in the auditing process. W also noted that planning at departmental level provided opportunities for staff to get closer to the problems of teaching and learning in the classroom and to try and find ways of tackling them. V explained that previous plans had been 'more whole school oriented, but this last one involved more discussion at departmental level, and most of the action plans are department based as well' (V).

A pointed out that although previous plans had involved consultation at certain levels, this had not been done in a systematic way. She believed there should be wider consultation, and she stated that in the next planning cycle due to start soon, 'we plan to involve everyone, teaching and support staff, students and parents.'

Implementation of Development Plans

The main aspects considered below relate to the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the development plans and the maintenance of the achievements of previous plans.

All interviewees agreed that implementation of action plans took place mainly at departmental level (at least for the last plan of 2003 - 2005) and this was the responsibility of individual teachers, once agreement had been reached in the weekly departmental meetings as to who did what to ensure the implementation of the plans. All SIT members confirmed that action plans that related to whole school

activities were the responsibility of the SIT, which normally met weekly to check on progress and decided on further action.

All respondents reported that monitoring and evaluation was done mainly by HoDs – for department based plans – and by the SIT for the school wide plans. E, F and U explained that at department level this was done through weekly meetings of department staff, where they checked on progress, examined students' assessment results, and considered further strategies for action. F gave a typical description:

The achievement of targets stated in the department level plans goes into the day to day practice of teachers; periodically, through departmental meetings, we check the plan, we review what needs to be done, and we make changes to or adjust the plan where necessary. Monitoring of the plans is usually done by the HoD. Evaluation is also done at departmental as well as at whole school levels.

D who has responsibility for compiling the evaluation reports, explained: 'I liaise with HoDs and I get reports of activities carried out related to the plans. I sometimes attend the departments' PD sessions'. X presented a similar scenario and confirmed D's last point:

In the weekly department meetings we agree on strategies to be used to implement the plans. HoDs generally monitors. Management team sometimes also attend our departmental meetings, SIP sessions and they sometimes go into classes as well. In the morning briefings things that have been observed are also mentioned.

Y was the only person who mentioned consultation with students as part of this process:

We collect data related to the target; sometimes we also consult with students, especially at S3, S4 and S5 levels. We examine student records – both marks and attendance – and we check their assessment results.

Generally all the interviewees seemed inclined to demonstrate that the Ministry's guidelines were being followed. However, except for D and W, the other ten respondents acknowledged that the process did not always work as expected. U

stated unequivocally that ‘implementation tends to be one of the weaknesses of this process’. He gave the following example:

Earlier this week we had an evaluation meeting, and in the report it said that the problem of truancy had improved, but we know it hasn’t. It’s a serious problem in this school and we have yet to find solutions. One then wonders: is this to satisfy the ministry or is the process really having any effect?

E noted that there was a lot of paperwork involved, ‘quite a lot of time (spent) in discussion and writing reports but action is not always followed through’. He cited the case of the homework policy which the school had agreed on developing in the previous plan: ‘...we discussed at length but finally it was never written’.

A’s general assessment of the issue seemed to confirm the views of the others:

Systematic monitoring remains a problem, especially in relation to teaching and learning. It has been difficult to keep the focus on teaching and learning; so many other things crop up, we never seem to have enough time, and so it becomes difficult to maintain what has been gained.

C thought that some of the problems had to do with the fact that strong linkages were not made between the targets set and what actually happened in the classroom:

Emphasis should be on merging the plan, linking it with what is happening in the classroom, not on keeping records of everything that happens without necessarily making these links.

On the question of maintaining the achievements of previous plans, D explained that ‘maintenance plans are developed and they are part of the development plan; and they are monitored by the SI team’, but in X disagreed: ‘there were a few initiatives that were taken but they have not been maintained’. He gave the example of the maths assessment of incoming year one students that had been started by the maths department:

We assessed S1 students in maths in order to determine their levels and to work with them accordingly. We still do this at S1 but the process is not being carried on up the

system and so whatever gains have been made are not built on as the students move up the system.

D and X were the only two persons who commented specifically on the maintenance of targets already achieved.

Effectiveness of Development Planning

Interviewees were asked to comment on the effectiveness of the development planning process, and on perceived changes and achievements that, in their views, may be attributed to the process.

SMT and a few other SIT members tended to be more positive about the process than the other interviewees, pointing to changes in students' behaviour (B and D), the development planning process having become established in the school (C) and having met most of the targets set, as A stated: 'we met most targets at least in part and for some the achievements have been satisfactory'. A and C also cited improvements in classroom management and a greater awareness of the SIP generally. The others felt that there had been some gains but ultimately not very much had changed. They suggested - rather like X and Y put it - the process had 'worked 50/50'. X noted that 'it allow(ed) for collaboration, especially at departmental level', while Y specified that the process had been successful for teachers in particular: 'it's been successful in the sense that there is a good deal of sharing of knowledge, of information and teaching methods (among teachers)', a view confirmed by A, W, X and Z. C was rather more cautious:

It's perhaps hard to say whether such changes have happened as a result of development planning but the plans allow you to establish clear goals and to think of and work on ways of achieving them.

E, W, X and Y believed that ‘for pupils it (had) made not so much difference’ (W and Y). X and E considered the limited effects of development planning on student performance more in terms of problems related to the implementation of the plans, whereas U, W and Y saw them as a lack of interest on the part of students.

According to X

There have been improvements in terms of behaviour and learning on the one hand but on the other hand some situations have got worse; for example, less able students in S5-6 (the sixth stream) have switched off from school work already and for students like that not enough is being done. The introduction of the IGCSE in some ways raised their hopes but now they know this exam is not suited to their ability and they’ve given up.

E however, seemed even more pessimistic and saw no clear solution:

We have a big problem of discipline, and students’ performance has not improved over time. There are a good number of slow learners, there is also boys’ under-achievement, all problems that we need to tackle.

U, W and Y were of the view that teachers did their best but students were ‘not interested in school work’ (U). W mentioned problems of truancy that neither the school nor parents could resolve. Y also echoed this attitude of helplessness: ‘students seem to be often not interested in learning, especially those in the lower sets. ... They have no incentive to learn’. These teachers all seemed to share Z’s and Y’s views that the onus was on the students to perform, almost independently of the teachers:

Students now know what is expected of them. Those who are not performing know it is their fault; the opportunity is there for them to learn; teachers want them to succeed, they want to eliminate the O and E grades. (Z)

All is focused on the teacher, as if the teacher is inhibiting learning; but we have to all pull together. (Y)

Apart from improvements in teacher collaboration mentioned above, non SIT members saw only some slight changes. V felt that ‘the planning process ha(d)

provided a framework that ha(d) got us to see what's changed' while Z thought that setting targets challenged them 'to meet these targets'. U was more uncertain: 'it should have made some difference... but it's difficult to quantify'. This point was illustrated by X who referred to instances when staff had made a concerted effort to focus on specific targets, but the outcomes did not seem to have had the desired effects:

For instance, the school wanted to focus on the quality of assessment being given at the end of terms. An audit was carried out, papers were checked on and the quality of the papers improved. In the national exams we have maintained our standard, but it is only in the middle range. More students seem to be slipping behind, the gap between the better performers and the weakest ones seem to be getting wider. (X)

U did not believe there were links between development planning and improvement in the school: 'teachers know their roles and are guided by the school's vision. If people are asked about the areas of focus of the last plan we had, they probably wouldn't know'.

C pointed to the need for more support for the development planning process from the Ministry of Education, and in particular from the National Institute of Education which, he believed, should assist with action research and provide other expertise in school improvement. He felt schools did the best they could but the Ministry should give this process the status and attention it required to really make a difference.

When asked whether they felt able to voice their views and concerns where the process had not worked so well, B, C, D, F along with U, V, W and Z said they could, through the departmental and through whole school meetings. E, U, X and Y agreed that they could indeed express their views but this had no effect on

decisions, as X explained: ‘yes, at departmental level, but at school level decisions are sometimes made over our heads’.

Evidence from observation of SIT meetings

The process and the implementation of Development Planning

In the first meeting observed no direct reference was made to the development planning process, but the fact that the main focus was on the implementation of the new development plan, implied the successful application of the process. The chairperson went over the targets set for the period 2006 – 2008; she checked on actions that had been agreed on and whether they had been done; for example, display of the school’s vision statement around the school, and the adoption of a common daily lesson planning format. With regard to the latter, most of the departmental representatives were uncertain as to whether it was being used and showed little enthusiasm to find out. One representative suggested that experienced teachers could simply go by their weekly schemes of work for daily planning and that this lesson planning format was not needed. The head, however, was insistent that this had been agreed on and it was to be done.

The question of monitoring roles was also raised in this meeting, by a HoD who stated that it was the responsibility of the DHC to check on whether teachers were using the appropriate plans and teaching materials. The DHC strongly maintained that in the first instance this was the job of the HoD. No clarification was brought on this point by the chair and the subject was quickly changed to student behaviour, it seemed, as a diversion to avoid further confrontation.

The second meeting focused mainly on the monitoring of action plans being implemented, and enhancing the pastoral care services of the school. Once again the development planning process was only implied. Monitoring of teaching and learning was a major concern of the school from the previous plan of 2003 – 2005, and as only limited progress had been made then, according to the plan's evaluation reports, the issue remained on the SIT's agenda.

The SMT reported on six lesson observations they had made during the past week to check on the use of the lesson planning format. They reported mixed results: three out of the six teachers observed were not using the agreed planning format. No clear course of action to address this issue was decided on during the meeting.

The effectiveness of Development Planning

In both meetings observed no direct reference was made to changes and improvements brought about by development planning, but by implication the connections were assumed. The first meeting dealt with targets from the new development plan, related to establishing a values-based school as a means of improving students' behaviour, and monitoring of teaching and learning. A workshop was being planned for staff on teachers' responsibility for pastoral care because it was felt that teachers continued to shirk such responsibilities. The meeting also agreed that the monitoring of students' attendance and punctuality, through an authorisation card system, should continue. The adoption of the common lesson planning format, it was hoped, would encourage teachers to respond better to the needs of students.

Actions agreed upon in the second meeting, for instance, assumed that changes should happen: the introduction of a special programme for non literate students at secondary year 2 level, operating through withdrawal from normal class was to be instituted, as one of the tasks related to the target aiming to enhance students' learning. Another activity, involving a survey of students' views on the pastoral care services of the school, was being planned in relation to another target which aimed to improve pastoral care generally. There seemed to be tacit agreement among SIT members that improvements would happen as a result of their actions.

Professional Development

Professional Development (PD) activities associated with the SIP are organised in all state schools on a weekly basis, for a minimum of one and a half hours, during normal school time. Students are sent home early while teaching staff participate in scheduled activities, in principle, linked to the schools' development plans.

On average schools are expected to organise ten PD sessions over a thirteen-week term. They may be held at departmental, other group or at whole school level, depending on the aims and the nature of the activities planned. A plan for each term is drawn up and the PDF co-ordinates and oversees the planning and implementation of the PD sessions. Such arrangements prevail in all state schools.

The findings below are considered in terms of the format and types of PD activities organised, perceptions of PD and its impact on staff's thinking and practice.

Evidence from documentary analysis

The format and types of Professional Development activities

Over the six years of planning, the termly PD plans produced by the school show a gradual shift towards making closer links between the action plans and the PD activities. For example, when the school was working on the behaviour improvement target in the 2003 development plan, a number of PD sessions were held on anger management with the assistance of the National Council for Children – a local NGO. Some departmental level PD sessions held during the 1999 – 2002 development plan involved the production of materials for the less able students who were being targeted for improvement then. However, generally the connections between the targets set and the PD plan are not always obvious or straightforward. Examination of a 25% sample of the plans produced during the six years, revealed that about half of the sessions were department based, and took the form of working groups to develop policies, to analyse examination results and to produce instructional materials. The other sessions were at whole school level, involving occasional presentations, but more often dealing with development planning issues and administrative matters. Only about 22% of PD activities seemed to be directly related to teaching and learning.

According to the QA report of 2001, '[I]t was not clear how the objectives and the activities of the professional development plan were linked to the priorities of the school development plan' (Ministry of Education, 2001: 11). Minutes of the SIT meetings made no reference to PD other than confirmations of PD sessions planned or held.

Perceptions of PD and its impact on people's thinking and practice

The evaluation reports of the development plans did not address this issue, mainly because a separate PD evaluation report is done termly by the PDF. This report comments on the implementation of the PD plans, and evaluates the delivery of the sessions, which are found to be generally satisfactory, but it does not attempt to examine the impact of PD on teachers and on classroom practice.

Some evaluative comments on PD were made in the 2001 QA report. It found that at departmental level teachers 'were being fully involved in the preparation and delivery' of PD sessions and the school management reported improvements in teachers' acceptance of PD, but there were mixed views among staff as to the relevance and usefulness of PD (Ministry of Education, 2001: 6). The QA team noted a lack of commitment to PD among some teachers and the report stated that 'in the classroom visits carried out by the evaluation team, there was as yet little evidence that the sessions were having an impact on teachers' lesson planning and delivery' (ibid: 6). The team's follow-up report of 2003 made no comment on PD.

Findings from interviews

The format and types of Professional Development activities

All SIT members explained that they got together at the end of each term and decided on the PD plan for the next term, based on the identified needs of staff in relation to the set targets of the development plan. The PD plan was finalised at the start of each term and generally six sessions took place at department level and four at whole school level. Department level sessions were the responsibility of the HoDs who had to identify the facilitators, ensure the smooth delivery of the

sessions and then provide a report in writing to the PDF. They mentioned that PD sessions may take the form of discussion group meetings; workshops, which were sometimes facilitated by outside resource persons, (they gave examples of the anger management and the IGCE training workshops). Staff also engaged in pair work or group work for examinations preparation, and presentations on selected topics.

Non SIT members had slightly more divergent views. W, Y and Z said that the topics for the sessions were decided on by the headteacher or the SMT, in consultation with various other groups in the school. They agreed with the other interviewees about the format and frequency of PD – every Tuesday afternoon, over ten weeks of the 13 week terms. Z emphasised the involvement of all teaching staff in the finalisation of the programme:

The programme is decided on at the end of the previous term and the whole school in one of its meetings agrees. So staff do have a say in what is contained in the programme.

F and U observed that there was a certain degree of overlap between the department-based PD sessions and the weekly departmental meetings which focused mainly on curriculum issues: ‘Much of what happens in the departmental meetings could be regarded as PD’. (F)

All twelve respondents agreed that department level PD activities worked better than whole school ones where people were less involved: ‘teachers tend to prefer the more interactive sessions than the more directly led ones’ (B), and ‘the sessions that ...focus on our subject areas’ (X). V and Z thought that departmental sessions better matched their needs and allow teachers to ‘share more easily. We can achieve more and they (such sessions) are easier to manage. The focus then is on subject

based problems' (Z). However, W observed that although departmental sessions were better appreciated, they were not always satisfactory:

In spite of agreements made during the meetings not all teachers implement the ideas in the same way. Some let students get away with breaking rules or do not enforce the decisions taken, especially with regard to students' behaviour.

D had a different type of concern about departmental PD sessions. She felt that 'generally the sessions (were) ok, but now and again, depending on departments, they lose track and people don't gain much'. A was the only one who mentioned that activities 'facilitated by outside resource persons seem(ed) to work best'.

Perceptions of PD

All twelve respondents agreed that PD was received with mixed feelings, accepted because it was imposed, but with reluctance and resentment in some cases. C and D thought that some staff found it useful - 'about half of the staff' in C's view – and according to D 'now it has become more accepted'. A believed that a certain degree of ambivalence persisted in teachers' perceptions of PD; many still considered the scheduled activities as amounting to the SIP, which, in their view, only took place on Tuesday afternoons: 'PD and SIP have taken on negative connotations in some people's minds partly because they see it as an imposition' (A). And on the Tuesday afternoons, as Z explained, 'people were switched off even before they went in'.

When asked whether they thought it could be done differently, half of the respondents (A, D, F, V, Y and Z) suggested that PD and departmental curriculum meetings should be combined since there was already a certain amount of overlap.

D explained that this was already practiced in her department: 'often the same issues are discussed. In our department we often do combine, and it works well'.

B, C, U, V and Y proposed that PD sessions should take place fortnightly or monthly, rather than weekly, or 'scheduled during the school holidays, one or two days before the start of term' (B). D observed the change it made to teachers' participation when sessions were organised during one of the days of the half term break: 'sessions at half term, when people feel under less pressure...tend to be better, more relaxed, and they (teachers) are more willing to participate'.

C, E and W also considered changes in terms of the types of sessions organised. C thought the PD sessions 'should be more interactive', with a greater input from the SI co-ordinator who should facilitate linkages with resource persons. W suggested there should be greater use 'of visual aids, films and other forms of audio visual media'. E had expected the PD sessions to take the form of small action research projects where the focus would be on improving one aspect of school life at a time. He felt that at the moment 'rather than building on what we have achieved, we keep starting all over again each time'.

Eight of the respondents (B, C, D, F, U, V, W and Z) stated that it would be possible for them to propose alternative modes of PD, normally through the SIT and departmental meetings. X and Y felt that although they could do so, their views were not likely to be taken into account, whereas E said he supposed they could, but the tendency was simply to accept.

The impact of PD

All respondents agreed that PD activities had made a difference to most teachers, enhancing their awareness of school improvement initiatives, developing their subject knowledge and encouraging them to be more open about their teaching and to share experiences. A, U, X, Y and Z all mentioned the ‘sharing of experiences amongst teachers within departments,’ to use A’s words. Z believed that such sharing also ‘brought about a certain degree of accountability among teachers’, and he mentioned the example of marks in maths that had been low for a while:

But the fact that now we can share information related to students’ performance, maths teachers feel they have to make an effort to improve the marks; in a way it pressurises them to produce better results.

Z and X also referred to a greater focus on learning through student target setting, which V and W thought had brought about changes of attitude among students. D also mentioned improvements in students’ adherence to the dress code and ‘a greater sense of belonging in the school generally’.

Other than the above references to the impact of PD activities on students’ learning, respondents’ comments referred to their impact on teachers only. D observed that ‘previously... people used to be often late for classes, and this has improved a lot now’. C thought teachers were keeping better records of students’ progress, and now knew more about mixed ability teaching. B and F noted that ‘teachers were producing better exam papers’ (F) following workshops on assessment processes.

A believed that teachers did ‘try to take into the classrooms the kinds of solutions discussed during PD’, a point confirmed by X who said ‘the decisions we make as a result of our discussions ... are usually implemented and you can see a change

sometimes in the classrooms'. However, U, also supported by F and Y, expressed doubt at his colleagues' capacity to do this:

We have developed procedures to help us deal with certain problems, but there are slow learners among teachers as well, and so they don't always put into practice what they learn.

E seemed to have even less faith in the positive effects of PD activities; he thought that 'these things would probably have happened anyway' regardless of PD.

Apart from the headteacher, there seemed to be some confusion in most other respondents' minds as to activities related to the effects of PD specifically, as opposed to the process of development planning generally, as indicated by some of the examples they gave above as proof of improvements. For instance the references to improved communication between teachers, greater collaboration and accountability had been given as examples of change in relation to development planning earlier on, not necessarily a direct consequence of PD activities.

On the question of the impact of PD on their own thinking and practice, all respondents (excluding the head who wasn't asked this question) said they had gained, to a greater or lesser extent, in a number of areas. B, D, V and W felt they had gained in confidence, being now better able 'to facilitate workshops' (B), to co-ordinate PD activities and be more reflective (D); 'to share with others... and teach across the range of levels' (V) and 'to cope with behaviour problems' (W). F also mentioned that he had 'learnt from the experiences of others', while C and U believed PD activities had enhanced their management roles, helping them to better manage and plan' (C).

E, X, Y and Z who expressed greater despondency over PD still felt they had gained in various ways. As Y put it: 'there's no way you wouldn't gain something', and he thought he had 'learnt new things'. E stated that he had learned new IT skills, and Z explained his learning thus: 'forewarned is forearmed; now that we do share information and experiences it is easier to anticipate what might happen, and for us to take pre-emptive actions'. X expressed willingness to 'try and incorporate the things learnt through PD in my teaching but it is not always possible.' He cited constraints of limited resources and time. These comments, it should be noted, are all self-reports.

In spite of the general view that PD activities were an imposition, all respondents agreed that they were important and that they should remain. Suggestions for change included the timing, the formality of sessions and that they should perhaps take place at departmental level mainly. X seemed to summarise the views of the others when he explained:

The school needs to be like something mobile. Some things get to you only when you get together with others and talk them through. You may think you're doing right but there are always new ideas to be learnt and you gain through sharing.

Evidence from observation of SIT meetings

The format and types of Professional Development activities

Both meetings included discussion of the forthcoming PD sessions on teachers' responsibility for pastoral care. This was related to one of the targets set, and was to take place over a day during the half term break. Prior to that a survey to obtain students' views on the pastoral care provisions of the school was also planned, time

being taken in the second meeting to actually devise the question for the focus group meetings.

Perceptions of PD and its impact on people's thinking and practice

No direct reference was made to any of the aspects of PD considered here in either of the SIT meetings observed. However, it was implied that planned workshops bring about changes in the attitudes of teachers towards pastoral care issues. Two SMT members expressed the view that the sessions may lead teachers to consider pastoral care as part of their responsibilities.

Perceptions of Leadership

This section presents perceptions of the actual leadership style in the school. Comments on the possible effects of the smallness of the system on the SIP are also included where relevant.

Evidence from documentary analysis

The school's own evaluation reports do not comment in any way on leadership in the school. SI co-ordinator's evaluation reports, however, do mention the need to 'encourage the (school's) management team to take a higher profile lead in the development planning process' (SIP, 2003: 6). By the end of 2004 the SI co-ordinator's report noted that 'more focus is being given to the Development Plan' and that the management was making a co-ordinated effort to implement the development plan and to encourage a learning culture (SIP, 2004).

Findings from interviews

C, E and Z pointed out that both the head and DHC were in their first year in these positions, and therefore they needed time to settle in. A and B believed that their approach was collaborative and that there was ‘good co-operation’ (A) between the SMT and HoDs. One SMT member remarked that on occasion she had ‘a tendency to monopolise power’ when she wanted to get things done quickly, but noted that good team work was developing in the school. D and Z believed that there was ‘consultation and delegation of tasks’ (D) and ‘much delegation of authority’ (Z). B also mentioned consultation with students, through a students’ council representing mainly the upper secondary students.

These views were not shared by the other respondents. E, F, U, V, X and Y maintained that the head was too authoritarian, sometimes undiplomatic and not very approachable. Their views also differed about the way the SMT operated; F thought that the head tended to ‘minimise contact with students’ while the DHC was trying to ‘get closer to people’. W favoured the DHCs attempts ‘to be fair and disciplined’, but U thought he had a rather confused approach to the DHC role, wanting to be both popular and strict. While U noted that the DHP was very good, ‘trying hard to help students’, W thought that the DHP role was not taken seriously in the school, and there were problems of confidentiality with regard to student information. X pointed to a lack of consistency in decision making among SMT members while Y thought the Team should provide more support to teachers. At middle management level (HoDs and Heads of Year -HoYs) X believed that ‘the type of leadership (was) consultative, although sometimes there (was) some uncertainty on certain decisions’. All respondents, (apart from the headteacher who

was not asked this question), agreed that they had numerous opportunities to take the lead in the school, through departmental, club and other whole school activities.

It is to be noted that all respondents, except for the head, seemed to view leadership in the school in terms of personalities, and mainly that of the headteacher. Five SIT members referred to the 'leadership' or 'management' as being the head and the two deputies, while five teachers interpreted leadership as 'the head'. Only X mentioned the HoDs and Heads of Year, and included them in his discussion of the leadership of the school.

The SMT also commented on the possible effects of the small size of the community. The members thought there were advantages in the sense of getting to know the staff and student community very well. B referred to the school as being 'rather like a family' but A and C had reservations about the resulting expectations of people, as A explained:

People find it very hard to accept criticisms from management and colleagues; there is so much that is known about everyone, and the personal gets mixed with the professional aspects of work so easily.

Evidence from observation of SIT meetings

The findings here are given generally in relation to aspects of leadership that surfaced during the observation of the two SIT meetings. Both meetings were chaired by the headteacher who normally led the SIT. All members participated in the discussions and made suggestions for actions or contributed ideas at different stages. There was an atmosphere of easy exchange although staff sometimes deferred to the head. One instance was the decision to have focus group interviews

with students regarding the survey of their views on the pastoral care services of the school: the head favoured this idea and overruled three others who had expressed reservations and had proposed a questionnaire.

There was no direct discussion of leadership issues, although one member of the SMT noted, in the first meeting, that he was not able to fully undertake his curriculum support role because he often had to attend to the disciplinary problems which middle level leaders were unwilling to address. The preoccupation of the SIT with getting teachers to assume more responsibility for pastoral care through PD, may also be considered as a move to distribute leadership roles.

Summary

Capucin Secondary School appears to have a clear vision of the kind of student and staff community it wants to nurture, expressed through its stated vision statement. Although most respondents thought the vision influenced the way people worked to some extent, the school struggled to align its practices with the aspirations of its vision.

Development planning was considered as a useful tool for setting clear directions and ensuring future development. Staff felt they now knew the process well, and the identification of priority areas for improvement gave the school a focus on the achievement of set targets. However, the implementation of the development plans seemed to pose many problems. Insufficient correspondence between the targets and tasks, compounded by difficulties in maintaining systematic monitoring processes, meant that targets were not fully achieved. Successes were claimed, with

little supporting evidence. Evaluation reports appear to be aimed at satisfying the requirements of the Ministry more than contributing to the developmental needs of the school.

School-based PD activities were generally viewed as an imposition and some questioned their usefulness. Nevertheless there was unanimous agreement that it should be maintained, and most staff affirmed that they had personally gained from PD and they endeavoured to apply the new learning to their classrooms. However, noticeable changes in teachers' classroom practice that could be linked to PD activities were not observed.

Divergent views prevailed of the actual leadership of the school, with a strong tendency towards a view of an autocratic leadership style and a lack on convergence among the SMT. Generally the leadership of the school was considered mainly in terms of the person of the headteacher.

Chapter six: Case Study 2 – Kolibri Secondary School

Introduction

Kolibri Secondary School is a rural school serving a number of small coastal villages on the main island. Economic activity in the region is concentrated around non-industrial fishing, farming and tourism related activities. At the beginning of 2006 the school had a population of 810 students, with almost equal numbers of boys and girls, from a diverse socio-economic background. There were 56 teaching staff and 23 non-teaching staff, along with the three SMT members.

The implementation of a new development plan started in January 2006, and it was being monitored by a newly formed SIT comprising the head, the two deputies, the PDF and five teachers who represented the different subject departments. The head led the SIT; he had been head at Kolibri School for only one year. The two deputies were new to their posts, although they had both worked in the school as HoDs for a number of years prior to their present appointments. For the two previous plans the SIT had been chaired by the PDF and the previous head had sometimes attended the meetings.

The sections that follow group together the data pertaining to the four areas being investigated. The interviewees were four teachers and two HoDs who were not members of the SIT, and six SIT members – the head and the two deputies, the PDF and two teachers acting as department representatives, one of whom had served on the previous SIT.

The School's vision

Evidence from the analysis of documents

The school's vision statements appear at the beginning of two of the three development plans produced so far. (The plans are from 1999-2001, 2003-2005 and 2006-2008.) The 1999 plan had only a mission statement, and it aimed to promote the 'integral development' of all students in order that they may become responsible citizens. The vision statements in the second and third plans stated that the school wished 'to ensure that the students and staff develop a sense of belonging... and to promote the good values and skills required for their integral development as responsible and hardworking citizens' (Development Plan 2003-2005: 4). While retaining the main elements of this vision statement, the one in the 2006 plan included references to the mechanisms through which the vision was to be attained. The main structure mentioned was the school's House system.

In a general way, the priorities selected for action, and the targets set in the plans, related to the aspirations of the vision, but no direct reference was made to it in any of the plans, nor in any of the other documents examined. One SI co-ordinator's reports commented that it was difficult to see 'clear logical links between the mission, audit and action plans' (Checklist for School Development Plans, 2000).

The QA evaluation report of 2000 referred to the emphasis placed on high expectations of students in the school, by both the head and a number of teachers, linked to behaviour, class attendance and participation, as well as high performance in examinations. However, the QA team also stated that 'many more teachers

needed to take up this culture of high expectations' (Ministry of Education, 2000: 3), and the report suggested that this could be done by setting out clear values to be held by all staff and students. In its follow-up report of 2003, the QA team noted that the school 'had made significant progress towards meeting this main point of action' (Ministry of Education, 2003: 1). A set of values appeared in the 2003 development plan and the school had developed a number of policies and procedures regarding homework, discipline, attendance, assessment and teaching and learning. The report also noted that school rules and regulations had been incorporated into a 'student organiser' which had been distributed to students in the first few year levels. The QA team recommended, however, that the school ensured that there was greater ownership of the values and policies they had developed.

Findings from interviews

The interview questions referred to the respondents' perceptions of the school's vision and the ways in which they thought it influenced their practice and that of others in the school.

The six SIT members placed different degrees of emphasis on two main aspects they considered as part of the vision: C and D saw the vision as having to do with students taking greater responsibility for their own learning, while B, E and F considered the vision more in terms of teachers playing a strong motivating role and ensuring effective teaching and learning. A stated it was 'to promote a good sense of belonging'. A and C believed that the school's House system was a significant contributing factor in getting people to work together.

Four non SIT members also emphasised the motivating role of teachers to improve teaching and learning and to help students achieve. They talked of the vision having to do with ‘improving the quality of teaching and learning’ / ‘staff motivating students to learn’ (W and Z) and ‘trying to develop students in a holistic way’ (V and Y). U, W and Z added that such notions were universal anyway, being part of the belief system of everyone involved in education.

Regarding the influence of the vision on the way they and other people in the school worked, A, B, E and F agreed that it helped to motivate them and others to achieve the targets set. F thought it ‘guides what people do’, and according to A it ‘gives a common purpose’ to the school. However, C and D expressed the view that the vision was fine on paper but ‘in practice teamwork (was) weak’ (D). C felt that ‘the written down vision statement (was) not really known by everyone as such; people (were) not really aware of it’, perhaps because it was not restated often enough. They both thought it was important for people to identify with the vision, if it was to be known. According to B, however: ‘students do know of the school’s vision. It is talked about in the assemblies, and they know teachers’ expectations’.

All non SIT members agreed that the vision provided a motivating factor which helped them to work towards the targets set, as Y explained: ‘it provides a sort of target for us to work towards, to try to achieve’. V, W and X felt that some 10% to 15 % of teachers did not necessarily refer to the vision in their daily practices, while V and W also mentioned that students were not always interested in achieving their best. U observed that students did not really know the vision, ‘but they know they’re here to learn’.

Evidence from observation of SIT meetings

The two SIT meetings observed, on 5th April 2006 and 7th June 2006, were two months apart for a number of reasons. The team was supposed to meet weekly but this rarely happened because members tended to get involved in many other activities and the meeting schedule never seemed to be fixed. The meeting of 5th April was the last for term one, and the one of 7th June was the second one held in term two. In effect there was only one other meeting between the two observed, but in addition to the time delays between meetings there were also three weeks of school vacation.

There was one direct reference to the school's vision, during the first meeting observed. It had been decided in a previous meeting that the school's vision and mission statements should be displayed 'for public viewing/ visitors from outside' (Minutes of meeting, 22/3/06). The head explained that this would be done during the forthcoming vacation, and in a meeting with parents.

No direct or indirect reference was made to the school's vision in the second meeting.

Development Planning

This section presents evidence on three aspects of development planning in the school: the process of development planning used; the implementation of the development plans and changes and achievements that may be attributed to development planning in the school.

Evidence from the documentary analysis

The process of development planning

The development planning process used was in accordance with the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education. The development plans are clearly laid out and follow the steps indicated in the guidelines. The audit reports included in each of the school's development plans explain in detail the procedures used at school level, and the persons involved at each stage of the process of identifying the school's priorities for action. All teaching staff and members of the school management were involved and consulted in the process. For the first plan, in 1999, students' views were also sought, through a questionnaire survey, but this was not repeated for the other plans. According to all three plans the process was led and co-ordinated by the SIT, which was chaired by the PDF for the first two plans, and by the headteacher for the current plan.

In all three plans it was implied that the auditing process led to the identification of the priorities the school decided to work on, but they do not make clear how these priorities had been selected. This point was noted in the QA evaluation report with regard to the 1999 plan: 'it was not clear from the plan itself how these four priorities had emerged and, in particular, why there was such a strong focus on raising student performance' (Ministry of Education, 2000: 7). This may be due to the fact that the whole development planning process is highly prescriptive; the school may have assumed that everyone concerned knew how the steps proceeded. The fact remains, however, that the selected priorities did not seem to correspond

directly with the areas of strength and weaknesses identified through the audit process.

In both the 2003 and 2006 development plans, some of the priorities and targets seemed to lack congruence. Areas of priority such as ‘improve the assessment of learning’ (Development plan 2003-2005) had as targets: ‘to increase the students’ involvement in self evaluation’ and ‘to improve recording and communicating assessment information’. Unless all other aspects of assessment in the school were functioning satisfactorily, these two targets are unlikely to achieve the desired goal. Both the QA evaluation reports (of 2000 and 2003) suggest that this is not the case. A check on a sample of examination scripts in different subject areas ‘revealed a number of problems’ (Ministry of Education, 2000: 1) involving discrepancies between the types of questions posed, their correspondence with the syllabus, problems of wording and levels of difficulty. The 2003 QA follow-up report further noted that ‘in most departments, assessment results were mainly used to make decisions about pupil movement between classes, rather than to draw up plans for re-teaching’, (Ministry of Education, 2003: 2).

Implementation of Development Plans

The findings in this sub-section are presented in terms of the processes and mechanisms used by the school to monitor and evaluate the implementation of its plans, and the extent to which the achievements of previous plans were considered and maintained.

The school does not appear to have produced an evaluation report for the 1999 development plan, but progress reports covering that period, produced by the SI coordinators, suggest that the achievement of the plan was relatively limited. Their 2000 report mentioned repeatedly the amount of time it took for the action plans to be developed at department level – over a year - by which time the school was halfway through the planning cycle. They also noted the absence of a systematic process for monitoring the implementation of the action plans (SIP report, term 2, 2001), although they stated that the two deputies and some of the HoDs attempted to carry out some monitoring activities, mainly through classroom observation.

These difficulties are confirmed by the QA evaluation report of 2000 which suggested that the problem was perhaps concerned with the articulation of leadership roles:

A clear linking of the respective roles of the senior management team and the Heads of Departments would have made clear the responsibilities of different staff for achieving targets and for achieving progress. (Ministry of Education, *ibid*: 6)

The problems of monitoring and evaluating the action plans seemed to persist over time. The 2003 QA follow-up report noted once again that:

Monitoring plans (for effective delivery of lessons) developed by management were frequently not implemented. Classroom observations were limited, and evidence of meaningful individual feedback to teachers was rare.

The school's own evaluation reports for the 2003–2005 development plan, however, claim otherwise. At the end of 2003 the school reported that it had met four of its nine targets, while admitting that monitoring of the implementation of the plans had not always been done systematically and record keeping remained

haphazard. The 2004 evaluation report also referred to difficulties with monitoring but gave no specific details.

The maintenance of the achievements of previous targets hardly featured in any of the documents analysed. The first two development plans did not address the issue at all. The 2006 plan mentions that four of the targets from the previous plan were to be maintained over the next three years, but it only stated that they would be ‘monitored through normal monitoring structures’ (SDP, 2006: 4), without including the maintenance plans. At the same time, close reading of the evaluation reports suggests that a number of initiatives from previous plans were in fact being maintained, as they were mentioned as recurrent achievements in every report. These included the use of the ‘student organiser’, the homework policy, rules and regulations about uniforms. However, frequent changes in the school management midway through the implementation of development plans (over the six years there has been one change of heads and both deputies at different times), raises the issue of ensuring continuity in the planning process.

Changes and achievements attributed to development planning

The findings below are considered in terms of the perceived effectiveness of the development planning process in the school and the changes and achievements that may have come about as a result of it.

All the plans and reports seem to assume that the process works and that there are links between development planning and school improvement. The concepts behind

the process are not mentioned and direct comments on the effectiveness of the process are not made.

The extent to which the development plans were successfully implemented is discussed in the school's yearly and end of cycle evaluation reports and in the QA reports. The school's final evaluation report for the 1999 development plan is somewhat ambivalent about the achievement of its main target - 'developing the skills and strengths of students with learning difficulties.' While noting some improvement in the enthusiasm shown by students with learning difficulties and in teachers' awareness of students' needs, the report that the action plan

...had but a little impact on the school in terms of what is going on in the class. However, the school management and staff (teachers in particular) have become more conscious of the necessity to attend to the needs of all ability groups, especially to those of the students with learning difficulties. If maintained and properly monitored at all necessary steps and levels, it will no doubt make a difference in the teaching process and in the learning outcomes. (SDP evaluation, 2001)

The evaluation reports for the 2003-2005 development plan are more optimistic, indicating that most of the targets set had been achieved relative to the stated success criteria. This remains difficult to ascertain, however, because the success criteria are generally vague and very hard to quantify. For example, for the target: 'to improve the social behaviour of students' the success criteria were: 'students behave maturely with peers, staff and visitors. Students demonstrate good living values. Improved co-operation amongst students and staff' (Development plan 2003-2005: 27). The 2003 evaluation report explained that this was achieved through: a talk delivered to students on their rights and responsibilities; the re-establishment of a House system and a system of rewards for good behaviour. And it cites as evidence of success, a 'reduction in bullying and fighting on school

premises', 'a decrease in vandalism' and students' participation in a number of interschool competitions. Since, in the first instance, the extent and types of problems related to behaviour had not been specified, neither in the school audit nor in the evaluation report, it becomes impossible to verify the significance of the progress stated.

A growing awareness of such disparities is evident in the school's 2004 evaluation report, which attempts to quantify some of the available evidence. For instance, a table detailing the number and type of misbehaviour incidences is given. The final evaluation report for the 2003-2005 development plan restates the need for targets to be 'more specific and measurable as it has been difficult to measure the extent of achievements' (ibid: 5). The report concluded that only seven out of the fourteen targets set for the period 2003-2005 had been 'successfully achieved' (ibid: 28).

The new development plan for 2006-2008 retained the priority: 'improve the quality of teaching for effective learning', but the wording of the targets remain unspecific and may prove to be as difficult to measure successfully, as were the previous ones. The stems to the target statements simply say: 'to improve the quality of ...' and 'to meet the students' needs'.

According to the QA report of 2000 'there was some evidence that development planning had increased professional discussion among teachers' although it did not give any indication of such evidence. The QA follow-up report of 2003 mentioned that 'discussions and workshops focusing on teaching strategies had been organised' and 'had prompted departments to share their resources and experience;

...professional sharing and a team approach to lesson planning were still in evidence in some departments, but less so in others' (ibid: 2).

Findings from Interviews

The process of development planning

Referring to the 2006 planning process, all respondents said that the process involved auditing at department level first, where areas of concern were identified. They further explained that all the issues raised were then considered by the SIT which finally converted the concerns into targets and decided on an order of priority for the targets identified. The proposed targets were presented to the whole school for their endorsement, and depending on the targets selected, departments then prepared their own action plans. The SIT drew up the action plans for whole school issues, and according to all interviewees, generally the two sets of action plans were linked.

Members of the SIT therefore tended to be more aware of the finer details of the process than the non members. The latter referred mainly to the process at departmental level while SIT members gave details of the different levels of consultation, as F explained:

The results of the departmental audits are compiled and summarised by the SI team, and common elements are drawn from there, and depending on the frequency of issues that come up, areas for action are prioritised. All of this forms the basis of the whole development plan. There are certain aspects that are specific to particular departments, so these are tackled at the level of these departments.

D and E who had been involved in the development of the previous plan (of 2003), described a similar process while A added that the audit at departmental level

focused in particular on teaching and learning: ‘our main priority in the present plan is to cater for the individual needs of each student’.

Concerns were raised by B and C who had not been involved in the development of the current plan because they were newly appointed in their jobs. They seemed to have difficulty in taking ownership of the plan, but explained that they had been very busy since the beginning of the term and had not had time to familiarise themselves with the plan, although C observed:

I found it already completed when I arrived, and I didn’t have any say in what it contains. From what I understand, the Head and the PDF worked on it... It was presented to the staff in a PD session at the start of this term, which I attended.

B remarked that there hadn’t ‘yet been a briefing session (meaning at SMT level) on the new development plan, so I don’t know the details’.

Implementation of Development Planning

The main aspects considered below relate to the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the development plans, and the maintenance of the achievements of previous plans.

All respondents agreed that the monitoring and evaluation of the development plans were the responsibilities of the SIT and the HoDs, depending on the level at which the action plans applied; but very few of them were at all specific about how these processes were carried out. D, E and F along with U, V, W and Z, gave very similar versions of the process, which may be summarised in the words of W:

At each level people implement aspects of the plans that are of concern to them, teachers, HoDs and the management. Monitoring and evaluation of departmental plans are done by HoDs while the SI team monitor and evaluate the whole school plan. The departments keep contact with senior management through meetings with the DHC.

Additionally A mentioned discussion of action plans at weekly departmental meetings as well as in the curriculum committee (which brought together all the HoDs, was chaired by the DHC and met fortnightly). 'Members of the senior management and the PDF also monitor the implementation of the plans' (A). He also explained that SMT members had agreed to take responsibility for keeping an eye on a few specific departments each, and attended their weekly meetings. Other members of the SMT, however, made no mention of this, citing instead the department and curriculum committee meetings, as their main means of monitoring the action plans.

In view of the ad hoc nature of monitoring processes discussed in the documentary analysis section above, the respondents here seemed to be referring to the expected implementation procedures rather than to the realities of the school. Some reflections came through which suggested that the reality was somewhat different.

B, U, W and Y commented on a number of difficulties:

They (HoDs and members of SIT) also meet informally with the senior management, but I think this needs to be more formalised. A fixed schedule for meetings should be done. (B)

The implication being that these meetings were not taking place very often; the same seemed to apply to the curriculum committee meetings, as noted by W:

The departments keep contact with senior management through meetings with the DHC, but so far there's been only one such meeting this term. They really should be more regular; we should have a fixed schedule.

(At the time of this interview it was already over halfway through the term.)

U and Z thought that monitoring was done by the SIT, 'mainly through checking records' (U), and that HoDs were 'supposed to do 3 or 4 classroom observations a term and some mentoring where necessary' (Z). Again this referred to what was expected.

D gave some indication of the problems they faced:

Implementation is another problem, however. I was involved in the evaluation of the last plan, and there was a major problem of record keeping, which meant that the evidence for what had been achieved was not there. It was therefore difficult to determine what had actually been achieved. The new plan for the next three years has been well debated, and some good planning has gone into it. We'll see how it works.

He also seemed to imply that certain targets from previous plans had been achieved, but neither he nor anyone else mentioned the maintenance of possible achievements. The SIT members seemed to reflect the attitude of A, who was of the view that:

It's difficult to say because I took over last year when the previous plan was in its final year. Achievements were being claimed but there didn't seem to be clear evidence to back up such claims.

Changes and achievements attributed to development planning

Interviewees were asked to comment on the effectiveness of the development planning process, as well as changes and achievements that may have taken place as a result of development planning.

Respondents highlighted both gains and concerns about the effectiveness of the development planning process. A and F believed that staff 'feel they are part of the process and have come to own it' (A) and they have 'actually taken ownership of the planning and implementation process' (F). A also thought that staff 'can now see the link between their plans and that of the school; they feel it's one process'.

Two other SMT members, however, expressed concern about the development planning process as well as teachers' capacity to extend their roles. D thought that

‘monitoring didn’t work too well; the roles of different people involved were not clear. Now, with the new plan it may change, but it is still to be implemented’. C had similar apprehensions:

There are many things that are still not clear to teachers, for example the idea of meeting students’ needs; teachers don’t really know what this implies – that they have to be able to cater for the best and the weakest.

Two thirds of all the interviewees were more positive about changes they believed had taken place in the school, as a result of development planning. They agreed that the one led to the other, and they cited a number of examples of improvements they had noticed. U, W and X mentioned the importance of collaborative planning which ‘brings people together’ (W). Together with Y, they thought that teachers’ attitudes were beginning to change, becoming more positive and growing professionally, as W explained: ‘there has been some professional growth for many teachers. I know it has been so for me.’ A also remarked that collaborative planning had improved the way departments worked: ‘HoDs and Heads of Year have got a better understanding of their roles. We have fewer complaints coming through, and eventually we will also involve support staff’. According to F record keeping, which had been an acknowledged weakness with previous plans, was improving:

More and more we also begin to see the importance of documenting what we do, of keeping evidence for the things that happen. For example, in the area of guidance and support, we keep records of incidents that happen, actions that have been taken. The school has an open door policy, and parents do feel they can come in to see the management and teachers about their children, and it’s important then to have evidence.

Generally respondents considered changes at the level of the school management and /or departments. Only F, W and X commented on improvements in relation to students’ achievements. F referred to the results of a recent survey of students’

views about the school, which found that the majority of students ‘were happy to be in the school, and liked to be at school’ (F). He added that ‘homework compliance had also improved, from around 40% to 64% now’, a point also made by X.

B, C, D and Y were not convinced that improvements had occurred which could be linked directly to development planning. They thought that there ought to be such links but the reality of the school seemed to provide no evidence that they could see. In C’s view little progress had been made:

We seem to have new plans that are repetitions of the old ones. Teachers are still not meeting students’ needs, classroom management remains a problem, including teachers going to class late. So the same problems are there.

B and C felt that there had in fact been a certain amount of regression. In relation to student and staff attitudes and behaviour, B noted that in the past ‘issues of punctuality and time management had improved; ...this now seems to be slipping back again’, and C remarked that ‘absences amongst teachers (were) still there, often the same ones’. D further elaborated on the difficulties involved:

Some things worked for a while, but the problem is consistency. Initiatives are taken, plans are implemented, but then actions are not reinforced and so we slip back. For example keeping records of homework, attendance and punctuality of students, truancy... records are kept for a while but then gradually they stop. There’s the example of the name box for students who misbehave: some people never did it at all, some start and then stop, others see unacceptable behaviour and turn the other way.

Y felt that improvements ‘depend(ed) on the individual teacher in the end’. Teachers had to be made accountable, and he thought that the school’s House system had helped towards this. He also questioned the way the evaluation of the development plans was done: ‘Maybe the way the evaluation is done does not show the evidence properly. Also students are not even asked about their views’.

Nonetheless, all respondents agreed that having the plans had helped to ‘make things happen faster,’ (F). They also maintained that it was important to plan, as D emphasised: ‘We need to foresee things, and planning is important in order to make things happen, and improve on what we do’. Y also observed that ‘financial support is also needed; to implement action plans we need money’.

Evidence from observation of SIT meetings

The process and the implementation of development planning

In both meetings observed references were made to aspects of development planning which implied considerations of the planning process. In the first meeting emphasis was placed on strategies for monitoring the implementation of the action plans and the development of school policies, in particular the homework policy. The latter was to be done through consultation at department level. There was detailed discussion of the adoption of a record form for monitoring the application of the homework policy and a PD session to reinforce its implementation. Members present also clarified their monitoring roles, with each one taking responsibility for checking on one or two subject departments.

The second meeting emphasised the monitoring of the implementation of action plans once again and the formulation of the first progress report on the implementation of the 2006 development plan. A few SIT members reported back on follow-up activities related to the homework policy and inter-departmental networking. The need to place more emphasis on the school’s ‘ethos and community links’ was brought up by one of the SIT members, and it was agreed

that the parent / teachers' association required some re-organisation in order to become more effective.

This meeting was attended by three members of the Ministry's central support group to the SIP, and they clarified several issues related to the compilation of the report. One of them also explained the importance of keeping records of assessment results over longer periods, at least for the duration of the current development plan. All present agreed that this was necessary and some gave examples of their usefulness, but in the end no specific decision was taken about the issue.

Changes and achievements attributed to Development Planning

No direct reference was made to changes and improvements that may have occurred as a result of development planning but the underlying assumption seemed to be that all the activities discussed would lead to improvements. The homework policy discussed in both meetings was seen as a means of getting teachers to be more systematic in the way they set homework, and of encouraging students to take their homework more seriously.

In the first meeting discussion of SIT members' monitoring roles implied that better monitoring would ensure more successful implementation of the plans; and in the second meeting it was assumed that developing closer contacts with parents and the community would improve students' learning.

Professional Development

The findings below are considered in terms of the format and types of PD activities organised, perceptions of PD and its impact on staff's thinking and practice.

Evidence from documentary analysis

The format and types of PD activities

Examination of a 25% sample of the PD plans produced during the past six years, revealed that over half of the sessions took place at department level, in the form of working groups and meetings to develop policies, to produce additional teaching/learning materials and to analyse examination results. The whole school sessions tended to take the form of formal presentations on issues such as 'living values', 'developing positive attitudes' and 'children's rights'. About one third of the PD sessions in the sample concerned aspects of development planning; for example departments worked on developing their own action plans, or carried out their auditing process. Over the six years, just over 20% of the sessions planned were directly linked to teaching and learning.

According to the PD evaluation reports (2001-2006), between half and three quarters of the activities planned were actually implemented. Many sessions had to be changed or cancelled because the prior planning had not been done effectively or presenters were unable to attend. For instance, in the first term of 2006 only five of the twelve PD sessions planned actually happened. As noted in one of the SI co-ordinators' 2002 reports, the SIT was not meeting regularly and therefore the

monitoring of PD was somewhat ad hoc. This was exacerbated by the absence of a PDF during the later part of 2001, when the organisation of PD became very erratic.

Perceptions of PD and its impact on people's thinking and practice

The development plans included one PD plan each, for one term. No comment or explanation was provided as to the connection of this plan to the targets set in the development plan. The PDF's evaluation reports comment on the sessions having taken place but say little about participants' perceptions. The SI co-ordinators' reports generally comment on PD, and in 1999 they remarked that some of the PD sessions observed were not related to school improvement targets. The time was being taken for administrative issues such as the planning of examinations. Their 2001 report (term one) talked of 'well planned and developed' sessions organised at department level, 'highlighting techniques to meet pupils' needs, especially the lower ability groups'. It also mentioned the school's participation in networking activities with other schools.

The school's own progress report for term one of 2000 mentioned the subject of some of the sessions organised and stated that they 'have somehow helped the teachers to reflect more in depth on their views and duties as professionals'. During the same period the QA evaluation team found that 'the importance of staff development was recognised by staff at all levels' (Ministry of Education, 2000: 3), but most of the PD sessions focused on departmental issues rather than addressing 'many basic development needs of staff' (ibid). They considered these to be related to classroom management, curriculum and lesson planning, meeting the needs of all

students, and assessment. The report also noted that ‘the place of PD sessions in relation to the SIP was also not clear to many staff’ (ibid: 4).

Findings from interviews

The format and types of PD activities

All respondents mentioned that the PD activities were derived from the audits carried out during the development planning sessions; that they were based on the activities of the school’s action plans and that the final plan for each term was put together by the SIT. They also explained that the sessions could take the form of workshops, presentations or working groups at departmental level. The SIT members tended to be more specific about details of the process used and the types of PD activities. The PDF, who was responsible for finalising and co-ordinating the plan, explained it thus:

Through the audit the needs expressed by staff are identified and the SI team then rates them in terms of frequency. Decisions as to what to include in the programme are based on that and are made in line with the goals of the development plan. The SI team draws up the PD plan and passes it on to the Head and the senior management. Changes may be made by senior management and they are also the main persons responsible for supervising the implementation.

A, D and E outlined a similar kind of process, but B and C were not so certain. B said she was not sure how the activities were decided on but she presumed they were based on the action plans, while C expressed strong reservations:

Now with this new plan, again, what I think is needed is not being taken into consideration; for example, I proposed sessions on classroom management issues, and going over articles on teaching and learning, but I don’t think they’re in the PD plan. The plan is drawn up by the SIT but it hasn’t met since the start of this term. I don’t really know the extent of the consultation that took place on this plan, and I know meeting time can also be a problem.

Non SIT respondents were less clear as to how the PD plans were determined. U, W, X and Z thought that they were decided on by the SIT, whereas V said it was the PDF who decided and drew up the plans. Y supposed it was all decided by the management, and both he and X observed that sometimes there were changes to the plan during the term, ‘for various reasons’ (X) but that the sessions normally happened weekly.

Eleven out of the twelve interviewees agreed that PD sessions at departmental level were better appreciated by teachers than the whole school meetings and presentations. Almost all respondents mentioned the greater level of participation, and E and F added that whole school sessions worked well ‘when people can then break up into departmental groups and work together on specific issues’ (E). B, however, doubt the effectiveness of departmental PD sessions:

In activities organised by departments, teachers don’t always take things seriously, and the jobs do not always get done properly. I noticed that in my own department when I was here before (as a HoD).

All interviewees agreed that, in general, about half the sessions in a term were held as whole school activities and the rest at departmental level.

Perceptions of PD

Except for F, the other eleven respondents felt that the scheduled PD activities were generally accepted but the concept was still considered as an imposition and therefore was resented by some teachers. C seemed to summarise the feelings of the others when he remarked that ‘people have resigned themselves to it. It’s not really liked and they don’t look forward to it’. F thought differently:

People are beginning to realise that it's an important way to get things to change and to make things work. They realise it's an opportunity to bring forward suggestions and to find solutions to problems.

He seemed to be referring more to the fact that teachers claimed the PD activities were useful to them. The contentious issue, they all felt, was the timing and sometimes the way activities were organised. C and Y emphasised the importance of basing PD on the expressed needs of teachers if they were to be regarded as useful: 'perhaps if the sessions were directly in response to what teachers felt they needed, then they would implement what they learnt' (C), a view echoed by Y:

It may also be better to get the views of teachers. The activities should be more related to the realities of the classroom. It would be better to find out what the teachers need – their areas of weakness – and give meaningful help in those areas.

D, W and Y suggested that the sessions could be organised differently, allowing for a certain amount of flexibility at department level. They believed that each department should have the possibility of determining their own needs and to organise PD activities accordingly. D proposed the following:

If we have clear objectives set for the tasks to be done, and we could be given a specific time to achieve the objectives, say to be done in two weeks, then if we meet the objectives earlier than planned there'd be no need for the next week's session. There's always other work to be done anyway. In this way we could be more flexible and people may better accept the idea of PD.

This, however, did not seem to be a view shared by the rest of the SIT. While they thought, in principle, that PD could be done differently, they pointed to a number of difficulties that would prevent change for the present, such as possible disruptions to students' learning; upsetting the time-table and objections from the Ministry.

The impact of PD

All respondents were of the view that PD activities had made a difference to most teachers' perceptions of their work and occasionally to their practice. E, F, V and Z noted that teachers were more open towards each other, discussing their classroom experiences more readily; W thought that 'there (was) more consideration given to students' needs' while U said that 'lesson delivery (had) improved'. E and X mentioned more team planning, and occasional attempts at team teaching.

B, U, X and Y seemed inclined to conclude that improvements in teachers' practices had happened because PD and the SIP were intended to bring this about: 'in view that teachers do learn new things in PD, there should be changes, and they do try' (B). She cited improvements in lesson planning which she had noticed, and the fact that sometimes teachers planned together and organised cover for each other without having to be told to do so. The last two examples were not aspects specifically related to PD, which may be indicative of the close association in some persons' minds of the effects of PD and the SIP generally. U, X and Y, also showed this tendency, through the examples of improvements they gave; for instance, the revival of the House system which they thought had had a positive impact on students' attitudes, and improvements in students' exam performance.

Only D took a more critical view of the impact of PD on teachers' perceptions and practice:

At the beginning, immediately after a session, yes; things change for a few weeks, but then they slip back, and so in the end nothing changes. For example, after the sessions on pastoral care, it was agreed that people would try and deal with student problems at classroom level. I was a class teacher then and we focused on good behaviour and punctuality and the class outlook changed so much, for the better. But then they moved on to the next level and these things were not maintained.

Nonetheless, he strongly believed in the value of PD and, along with nine other respondents, he felt he had gained much from it. The others spoke with enthusiasm about their experiences, feeling they had become ‘more positive’ in outlook (E). and PD had created ‘a forum for discussing issues affecting the school’ (Y). V and X believed that skills gained through PD had boosted their confidence to try out new techniques in their classrooms and to plan more adequately for the differentiated needs of students. C, however, felt that ‘teachers (were) still doing what they’ve been doing all along’. It should also be noted that this is all self reported evidence.

All respondents were unanimous in their expressed belief that PD was an important part of school life, which should definitely be retained, in a format best suited to the needs of all concerned. D and W explained why:

...to remind teachers and students of what standards are necessary to maintain. To remind people of their responsibilities, and to allow for opportunities to change the plans if necessary; in the past the plans have been stuck to rigidly but sometimes there is the need to change along the way. The form PD could take should vary. (D)

...to keep teachers on their toes, to keep alive those ideas we first encountered in educational studies years ago, to keep us growing professionally. Otherwise you lose contact with your profession and you stagnate. (W)

Evidence from observation of SIT meetings

The format and types of professional development activities

At both meetings observed the PD sessions to be held the following day were discussed and finalised. The PDF reviewed the objectives of the sessions and clarified issues related to delivery and outcomes. In the first meeting the head and

the PDF checked on progress made on the development of the homework policy which was being done at department level. This work had been started in a previous PD session. It was also stated that the PD session of the following day would be concerned with preparation of House activities to be organised at the end of term.

In the second meeting, early in the second term, the main PD activity was to carry out an analysis of the first term examination results, at department level. The PDF explained that the focus for PD in the second term was to be inter-departmental networking. One of the SI co-ordinators present pointed out that this should be clearly incorporated into the plan. In the final part of the meeting the team briefly evaluated the term one PD plan and finalised the one for the second term. It appeared that the homework policy was still being worked on. The following day's session involved presentations of aspects of the policy by the different departments.

Perceptions of PD and its impact on people's thinking and practice

No direct reference was made to any of the aspects of PD considered here, in either of the meetings. However, the team generally seemed to proceed under the assumption that the activities planned would have the desired effects on the target groups involved. For instance, in discussions of the second term PD plan, the underlying assumptions were that the planned sessions 'should get teachers to reflect on what they've been doing so far.' in the words of C, and obtain parental support for the implementation of the homework policy.

The evaluation of the previous term's PD plan, in the second meeting, gave some indication of the SIT's own perceptions of the impact of PD. The evaluation was

done mainly in terms of whether the sessions were held or not; their effectiveness was not brought into question at all. No explanation was given for the PD sessions that did not take place, nor the feasibility of planning a full programme. The general impression seemed to be one of somehow fulfilling the expectations of the Ministry, in the first instance, but without much emphasis on issues of accountability.

Perceptions of Leadership

This section presents perceptions of the actual leadership style in the school. Comments on the possible effects of the smallness of the systems on the SIP are also included where relevant.

Evidence from documentary analysis

The QA follow-up report of 2003 mentioned the efforts of the management team to improve on the implementation of school-based policies and to reflect ‘on how to reinforce its support for teachers’ (ibid, 2003: 2), but they were still beset with problems of inadequate staffing and difficulties with monitoring curriculum implementation at classroom level. This management team, however, moved to other schools at the beginning of 2005, and there were no comments in any of the documents examined, about the leadership of the new management team.

Findings from interviews

Among the SMT members, A believed that he practiced a distributed style of leadership: ‘We attempt to involve everyone’, and he gave the example of the House committees where there was representation of staff and students from different levels in the school, and including members of the management. He

thought that everyone in the school appreciated this style of leadership, pointing out that: ‘people feel comfortable; there is no feeling of hostility and they feel they can communicate directly to us. I teach as well, and this brings me closer to students’. The other members of the SMT agreed that ‘there is good team work’ and ‘frequent consultation’ (B), and they felt that staff and students appreciated their style of leadership; in the words of C: ‘Yes, I think so (teachers appreciated their style of leadership). People don’t like it when things are imposed. Teachers like it when they can express their views; we pay attention and act on them’.

D considered the leadership from a different standpoint:

There is shared leadership, but people are not making good use of it; they still want the authority figure who is there to solve all the problems, to whom they can send all their problems.

All the other respondents considered the school leadership to be consultative and collaborative, but again they seemed to view leadership in terms of the headteacher mainly. While they all expressed appreciation for these aspects of the leadership, W, Y and Z mentioned ‘a lack of firmness’ (Y) when it came to problematic issues.

Z cited instances when he felt firm action was needed:

I am not too happy about the rather lenient attitudes shown at times towards both staff and students. For example, problems of punctuality – lateness to class, amongst both staff and students, is tolerated too often.

W referred to issues related to decision making. He noted occasions when ‘decision- making (didn’t) seem to happen in a concerted way’ among members of the SMT, especially on matters of policy; he also alluded to indecisiveness:

There are times when it is necessary to take a stand and make the appropriate decisions. It is sometimes necessary to be instructional, so it depends really on circumstances the head has to face. (W)

Comments on ineffective communication were made by three respondents, F, U and X. 'Sometimes information is not passed on effectively; it's a bit last minute' (X); whereas F complained about the information flow: 'things we agree on in discussions do not get passed on to the appropriate persons, and so blockages happen'. U saw a different kind of communication problem:

Personal issues are sometimes discussed at whole school level, rather than directly with the person concerned. Things are said somewhat indirectly but aimed at particular persons, as if the member of management is scared to confront people and issues like that. People are also not praised enough; those who work well should be praised. (U)

On the question of the school offering opportunities for staff to take the lead in various aspects of school life, it was unanimously agreed that this was always possible, and the six non SIT members said they were often encouraged to do so. All respondents mentioned examples of their involvement, ranging from participation in various school committees, the House system, school club activities and national educational events.

The SMT also commented on the possible effects of the small size of the community. C thought this had no effect whatever, whereas B believed it made a difference, in a positive way: 'it makes it easier to get on; people are more approachable because you know them'. A saw positive aspects relating to ease of communication with parents, and the possibility for closer participation in community activities, such as the district council. However he also noted that members of the school had to earn the respect of the community; 'we are always being scrutinised, even in our private lives, and we must always remain aware of our position and status in the community.'

Evidence from observation of SIT meetings

Both meetings were chaired by the head, who normally led the SIT. Setting the agenda seemed to be the responsibility of the PDF and he was asked in each meeting to read it out at the start. Various responsibilities were delegated to members of the SIT, which they readily accepted. All members had opportunities to participate in the discussions, but in both meetings observed, one member never spoke and another made only one short statement. Those who contributed to the discussions were generally open, clear and straightforward, and they tried to seek clarifications or decisions on a number of issues. The head, by contrast, had a tendency to expound on every point made, often wandering into side issues, and sometimes did not get to any decision, in spite of a few gentle probes from members. Consequently the meetings were rather long.

Summary

The school has a clearly articulated vision statement focusing on the holistic development of every child, backed by a set of values it expects all stakeholders to endorse. However, there is no clear evidence indicating that the vision is lived and the values are shared. In a general way the management and staff feel that their work is influenced by the vision and the values of the school.

The process of development planning seemed to have become accepted in the school, although most of the process was managed by the SIT. Staff noted the opportunities for more team work occasioned by the action planning process at department level. Various structures were in place for the monitoring of the implementation of the plans, but monitoring, along with the maintenance of the

achievements of previous targets, remained problematic. Targets set were often not readily measurable and inconsistencies in record keeping made it difficult for achievements to be ascertained.

The importance of PD was generally acknowledged. On the whole department-based PD activities were better appreciated than whole school sessions. The extent to which the activities were based on the expressed needs of teachers was not clear, and many of the planned weekly sessions did not actually happen. While teachers claimed that PD had influenced their thinking and sometimes their practice, documentary evidence and the views of some SMT members did not confirm this.

Most respondents felt that a distributed style of leadership was more or less in evidence in the school but there were times when a laissez-faire attitude resulted in slackness at various levels. Leadership seemed to be considered largely in terms of the authority of the headteacher.

Chapter Seven: Case study 3 - Sandragon Secondary

School

Introduction

The school is situated on one of the other islands of the Seychelles archipelago, about 45km to the north-east of the main island of Mahe. The island has a population of around 7200 inhabitants living in small villages scattered around the coastal areas. The main economic activity is tourism and related service industries, along with agriculture and fishing.

The school is the only secondary school on the island; at the beginning of 2006 it had a student population of 731, with equal numbers of boys and girls. There were 76 members of staff, 54 teaching staff, including the SMT, and 22 support staff. The SMT had been leading the school for the past four years, with no change of any of its members. They also form part of the SIT which is chaired by DHC, and it includes all nine HoDs. This is because the SIT doubles up as the HOD committee which oversees curriculum implementation and monitoring in the school.

The sections that follow group together the data collected with regard to the four main aspects of the SIP, in the same manner as for the previous two case studies. The interviewees were six teachers who were non SIT members, the SMT, the PDF and two HoDs, who were all SIT members.

The School's vision

Evidence from the analysis of documents

The school's vision is stated at the start of each of the development plans (2000-2003; 2003-2005 and 2006-2008) thus: 'we are determined to work together to achieve a better environment for the total development of each individual'. The statement is also displayed on the notice board of the headteacher's office. It is followed by a set of values which further emphasise the school's belief in the importance of the development of every student's potential, within a safe environment, where creativity, innovations and high academic standards are actively promoted.

Generally the school's vision seemed to be reflected in the priorities for action and the targets set. Throughout its three development plans the school selected as a priority area: 'meeting the learning needs of all students' (Development Plans 2000, 2003, 2006). A focus on providing a 'safe and conducive environment for learning' (Development Plan, 2000) was also maintained in all three plans, with targets aiming to develop a behaviour management policy (ibid, 2000) and 'ensuring consistency in the management of pupils' behaviour' (Development Plan, 2003).

Visioning and the importance of sharing a common vision for the school were considered in the auditing process, according to the school's audit reports contained in the development plans of 2003 and 2006. However, reference to the vision is not made in any of the school-based documents examined but its existence is generally implied.

The QA evaluation report of 2002, noted that the vision statement ‘conveyed a clear sense of what the school wanted to achieve, and the values it wanted to promote’ (Ministry of Education, 2002: 10).

Findings from interviews

Just over half of the participants, four SIT and three non SIT members, described the school’s vision as being centred on the holistic development of every student. A,C,D and F, along with U, V and W all referred to the notion of ‘the total development of students as whole persons’ as expressed by C. B. D, U and Y extended this idea to include promoting ‘the total development of everyone in the school’ (U), meaning both students and staff. A’s concern was ‘to try and get teachers to realise that every individual can learn, that everyone can achieve something.’

Six respondents mentioned other elements that they felt were important in the school’s vision. Creating a learning environment that ‘suited the interests and capacities of every student’ (D) was highlighted by C and D; the participation of all stakeholders in the whole life of the school (V and Y) and a focus ‘on the values of the school’ (W and Z) were also noted.

All interviewees agreed that the vision influenced the way people worked in the school, to various degrees. Two SIT members thought it had a strong influence on staff and students:

Yes, the vision is talked about in the school and we all try to work towards it. (E)

Yes, a lot. Teachers show greater commitment; it also implies good planning and preparation. For students: since the emphasis is on each individual student, they feel more valued; they feel their views are heard, that the school cares about them, and their attitudes have changed. (F)

The others felt that the vision influenced their work in more subtle ways, not necessarily on a day-to-day basis. However, both SIT and non SIT members pointed to certain limitations: A, B and U mentioned the unwillingness of some staff – about one third of the total, according to A – to show commitment to students and to the school. Y, on the other hand, saw the frequent staff movement as an inhibiting factor, resulting in a lack of continuity in whatever the school tried to achieve: ‘new staff have to be re-inducted into this vision every time’ (Y).

Evidence from observation of SIT meetings

Normally SIT meetings were held weekly, but during term two (mid-May to mid August) the schedule was upset by several public holidays and a number of meetings were not held. The first meeting observed was on 6th June 2006 and the second on 8th August 2006. There were four other meetings that took place during the intervening period.

No direct or indirect reference was made to the school’s vision in either of the meetings observed. The second meeting dealt with the compilation of the year’s evaluation report of the development plan. It could be argued that the team’s analysis of the tasks in the action plans implied the attainment of the vision. As the meeting took place in the headteacher’s office, the vision statement on the notice board was visible to all.

Development Planning

So far the school has implemented two development plans (2000–2003; 2003–2005), and they started on the implementation of a third one in January 2006. The first plan did not run through the stipulated three years; with the appointment of a new headteacher at the beginning of 2003, a fresh audit process was carried out and the second development plan was drawn up that same year.

This section presents evidence on the process of development planning used; the implementation of the plans and changes and achievements that may be attributed to development planning in the school.

Evidence from the documentary analysis

The process of Development Planning

The development plans are clearly laid out and they closely follow the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education. The process used is explained in the audit reports at the beginning of each plan and the persons involved are specified. According to all three plans the process was led by the SIT throughout.

The QA evaluation report (2002) referred to the extensive participation of staff, students and parents in the audit process of the first development plan. However, it took the SIT one year to analyse the student and parent questionnaires and to determine the areas of priority for action. The development of the second plan was done in four months, but it did not directly involve students or parents. It was guided by the findings of the QA evaluation of April 2002. ‘since QA had already

visited the school in April 2002 and had reported on the strengths and weaknesses of the school' (Development Plan, 2003).

The 2006 plan was based on the results of audits carried out at department level, in consultation with teachers only (Development Plan, 2006: 10), in spite of recommendations made in the 2002 QA evaluation report: 'in future audit exercises it will be important to bring in other sources of evidence...'.

The one-sidedness of the results of the auditing exercise is apparent in the 2003 and 2006 plans. The focus seems to be mainly on student reactions and student shortcomings, avoiding issues that relate to staff almost completely. For instance, the QA team in 2002 noted that 'teachers' lateness to class, particularly after breaks, was a major obstacle to time management. Students also took a long time to report to class' (Ministry of Education, 2002: 7). The school's own evaluation report of 2003 remarked that 'teachers' punctuality to class is a problem'. In the audit reports contained in both the 2003 and 2006 plans, problems of punctuality were mentioned by almost all departments, but only with reference to *students'* lateness.

Implementation of Development Planning

The findings below are presented in terms of the processes and mechanisms used by the school to monitor and evaluate the implementation of its plans, and the extent to which the achievements of previous were maintained.

According to the 2002 QA evaluation report there was 'an exceptionally high level of awareness of the school development plan and excellent mechanisms for

overseeing its implementation' (Ministry of Education: 11). The monitoring activities in the school's action plans were directly linked to the completion of each task or group of tasks; in most cases they were specific and achievable. A typical example from the 2003 development plan, under the target – 'promote self-evaluation among teachers', had as one of three tasks: 'Teachers to include self-evaluation comments in lesson planning exercise books'. Monitoring was to be done through 'checking the minutes of departmental meetings and HoDs progress reports'.

The school's evaluation reports as well as the SI co-ordinator's progress reports, however, keep mentioning problems with monitoring. The school's 2002 evaluation report concluded that only two of the three targets set had been achieved, and two of the reasons were that 'good monitoring tools had been prepared but they were not used effectively' and 'monitoring process was not followed systematically'. Their 2003 evaluation report observed that the SIT should 'monitor more closely the management of action plans', while the SI co-ordinator's comment in her progress report for the same period was: 'management to improve on the system of monitoring the action plan(s) and ensure it is integrated into the monitoring programme of management'. Reflection on this problem was apparent in the school's 2004 evaluation report where the SIT concluded that they were trying to tackle too many tasks 'hence hinder(ing) effective monitoring during implementation'.

The 2002 QA evaluation report came to somewhat different conclusions. Although the 'success criteria were defined in specific and measurable terms, and a lot of

thought was given to sources of evidence for monitoring purposes'. it was not at all clear 'how information from monitoring would be brought together for a final summative evaluation of the overall *impact* of the plan' (Ministry of Education, *ibid*: 11). Good monitoring tools such as observation schedules and self-evaluation checklists, agreed lesson planning formats, efficient record keeping, regular SIT meetings and good information flow were all acknowledged, but the report concluded that:

...the plan was not having the desired impact where it mattered most, that is, in the classroom. Most classrooms presented a bleak environment for learning, and the motivational needs of many pupils were not being met.' (*ibid*: 11)

The report mentioned differences in perceptions as a possible underlying factor; for example they observed that HoDs monitoring records of lesson plans indicated their satisfaction with the performance of teachers on the issue of differentiated learning, but the QA evaluation team found no evidence, from their classroom observations, of different abilities being catered for, or of the prepared materials being used.

On the issue of maintaining the achievement of previous targets, only the 2006 plan contained two maintenance priorities, carried over from the 2003 plan. There was a maintenance plan for two targets; it was stated that the monitoring was to be done 'through the school's monitoring structures throughout the cycles' (2006 Development Plan: 4), but details of such structures were not provided. Although the maintenance of achievements were not mentioned in either of the two previous development plans, two targets in the school's 2004 evaluation report were referred to as 'maintenance targets', with no further explanation.

The Effectiveness of Development Planning

In this sub-section the findings relate to changes and achievements attributed to development planning.

Referring to its targets for 2003-2005, (improve performance in mathematics, reinforce classroom management to enhance quality mixed ability teaching, and ensure consistency in the management of pupils' behaviour) the school claimed some success in all three areas. Better results in mathematics were noted in end of term and end of year assessments; continued networking took place with feeder schools, especially in the area of mathematics teaching; and increased cross-curricular awareness of mathematical concepts among teachers (SDP evaluation report, 2003 and 2004).

Achievement of the target promoting mixed ability teaching was more limited, according to the 2004 report. It was found that 'only about 32.2% of teachers actually differentiate their teaching during lesson delivery' (ibid, 2004: 7), even though 52% showed evidence of differentiation in their planning, using the checklist developed for the purpose. The main reasons reported were linked to 'inconsistency on the part of HoDs in monitoring teaching' (ibid) and the fact that they 'did not lay emphasis on differentiated teaching during their class observations' (ibid). It was also noted that they had carried out only about one sixth of the expected yearly classroom visits.

The 2004 QA follow-up report seemed to come to the same conclusion. They observed that all departments had developed action plans to address mixed ability

teaching, ‘but it was apparent that these were not implemented with the same conviction in all departments’ (ibid: 3). The QA team’s classroom observations revealed ‘no group work by ability’, very limited use of teaching aids, ‘and teacher-centred approaches predominated, with one or two notable exceptions’ (ibid).

One department that did follow through its action plans more systematically showed evidence of a greater degree of differentiated teaching, according to the school’s yearly evaluation report (2004). The HoD carried out around 60% of the scheduled classroom observations during 2004 (compared to an average of 20% by other HoDs), and she ‘had her purpose of visits clearly stated, and indicated when there was whole class approach, group work, pair work or individual work.’

The QA team in their follow up evaluation (2004) noted greater success in the achievement of the third target, dealing with the management of pupils’ behaviour.

Student attendance and punctuality in reporting to class had improved. ...Teachers were also more prompt in starting lessons. There was a reduction in noise level in the school as a whole, and more students were abiding by the school dress code. Fights among students were reported to be on the decrease, and so was the number of cases of inappropriate behaviour recorded at S4/S5 level. Teachers expressed satisfaction with the follow-up that was generally given to cases referred to management or members of the pastoral care team. (Ministry of Education, 2004: 6)

The school’s own evaluation at the end of 2004 confirms the points above. However, the report mentioned inconsistencies among teachers in the application of some of the disciplinary measures introduced.

Findings from Interviews

The process of development planning

There is consensus among respondents that ‘all teaching staff are involved at every step in the process’ as stated by B. They explained that consultation took place during the weekly PD sessions when all teaching staff were present. A, D and F in particular outlined the process followed in the compilation of the development plans. Their descriptions were reiterated in greater or lesser detail by all other participants:

The development plan is based on the results of the evaluation of the previous plan, and the strengths and weaknesses identified by all staff through the auditing process, first at department level and then at whole school level. The SIT members put the points together and then we go back to the whole school to get agreement on the final version of the plan. (F)

The prioritisation of areas for action was also done in consultation with all teaching staff. According to A:

We look at persistent areas of concern and then list them as pertinent priorities and from there identify the school’s priorities. As much as possible it is a collegial process. The department plans are derived from the whole school one.

D gave details of the final steps they followed:

Once agreement is reached the PDF puts together the almost final version of the document; it’s finalised in consultation with the SIT and with the whole school. In this way we can ensure that there is ownership of the development plan.

Consultation with students and parents was mentioned by Z only but she did not specify for which plan. W observed that the plan for PD activities was also drawn up during this process. The general feeling was that everyone was consulted and felt part of the process. In the words of V: ‘It is a collective exercise where everyone is involved. The views of the majority prevail but everyone can have their say’; by ‘everyone’ here he meant all teaching staff.

Implementation of Development Planning

The main aspects considered below relate to the monitoring of the implementation of the development plans and the maintenance of the achievements of previous plans.

All participants maintained that monitoring and evaluation of the action plans took place all through the implementation period of each plan, mainly by the SIT, the SMT and HoDs. However, the processes they described seemed to refer to the ideal situation rather than to the realities of the school. Two SIT members gave almost identical explanations:

The implementation and monitoring of the action plans are done by SIT members, mainly the HoDs and mentors. For the maintenance of targets already achieved ... action plans are drawn up and monitoring continues as stipulated in the plan. (D)

Monitoring is done at different levels, mainly by HODs and members of the senior management, again depending on the targets. Certain activities are maintained at school level, others at department level depending on the targets set. (C)

All non-SIT members, while being rather less specific about exact procedures, also pointed to the expected process, almost in accordance with the SIP guidelines. The responses of U and V were typical:

When the action plans are done, various people are identified as being responsible for various tasks, such as the HoDs, HoYs (heads of year), the deputy heads, sometimes teachers, depending on the targets set. (V)

The action plans state how the monitoring and evaluation are to be done, and by whom, and this is checked on by the management yearly. (U)

Half of the respondents – three SIT and three non SIT members – did admit that the processes they had described did not always work effectively. A, B and D admitted

that monitoring was often not done systematically, in spite of the agreed activities of the action plans:

Each HOD has a copy of the action plans and the monitoring plans. But there isn't always the commitment to monitoring and evaluation. People don't always do it. The SIT monitors through meetings, do fortnightly checks, but they are not always consistent either. Sometimes the agenda is too full or we forget. (A)

D saw poor time management, an overload of activities within the school and heavy demands made by the Ministry and others as factors that impeded consistent monitoring.

The three non SIT members alluded to problems of inconsistency in the implementation of the plans. Z thought that the difficulties had to do with 'people who simply (didn't) want to change', whereas Y believed there was a combination of factors involved:

Not everyone is committed, so things slip a bit sometimes. Sometimes we say good things, we make good plans but they are not always applied. New teachers too have difficulties at times: they are not used to the children's behaviour and they cannot always cope.

U suggested that 'maybe we need to go back to the action plans more often, to help keep ourselves on track'.

Respondents (F and X) from one department seemed to suggest that their approach to monitoring was rather more systematic than in other departments. Although she talked generally of the HoD's roles, F implied that she actually did carry them out:

In the weekly departmental meetings, we go over the plans and share out the tasks to be done. We try to go in accordance with the time-lines set, although we don't always manage to keep to this every time....we also do class visits and observation; afterwards we meet and discuss with the teacher concerned, considering ways to improve. If a problem persists then we discuss in the departmental meeting and we try to find solutions together. We also provide support to new teachers, who appreciate this type of support. The results of our monitoring exercise are also discussed in the SIT meetings.

X confirmed the leading role of the HoD:

At department level the HoD plays a big role in this; she also does classroom observations, twice a week, of two different teachers each time. Feedback is provided as quickly as possible and this is a system that works well.

Apart from A and D quoted above, the other participants did not dwell on the issue of maintaining the achievements of previous targets. They generally mentioned in passing that this was done through the activities stated in the maintenance plans.

The Effectiveness of Development Planning

Participants were asked to comment on the effectiveness of the development planning process and on perceived changes and achievements that, in their views, may be attributed to the process.

All respondents felt that the process of development planning in the school had worked well enough, and it had produced some noticeable results. A, F and Z, attempted to quantify the level of success, rating it between 70% and 75% successful. The others spoke more in terms of certain specific achievements and constraints that the school faced in the implementation of the plans. However, all such reports seemed based on personal impressions rather than on evidence held by the school.

A believed that now there was ‘much more ownership... (because) the content of the plans come from the teachers’. This view is echoed by V who maintained that the process was now established, and ‘the issues that are taken up come from us, and we want to bring about changes’. B, D and F observed that the plans had helped ‘to determine our path’ (D), and ‘have provided a focus for actions in the school’

(B). Three other SIT members, C, D and E, highlighted improvements in teachers' capacities to handle mixed ability teaching; E believed that 'classroom management involving weaker groups (was) no longer a problem', while D listed a number of achievements, including improvements in lesson planning, in the quality and process of school-based assessment and the empowerment of teachers. With regard to student achievement he thought:

- The completion rate of homework has also improved.

- Communication amongst staff and between staff and students has improved as well, eg. there's more involvement of students in school life, there are fewer students out of class. (D)

Non SIT members also acknowledged a number of achievements. With regard to mixed ability teaching, W explained that in his department teachers were 'modifying (their) strategies to try and make this work'. U and X believed that accountability had improved and there was 'more co-operation between staff' (X). V, Y and Z considered changes in terms of student achievement as well. V thought that students were 'coming out more, through the various committees where they (were) represented', while Y stated that 'academically... students' results have improved,' although she did not substantiate this claim. Z, along with B noted that 'discipline had improved' (B) especially among 'students of lower ability' (Z).

All participants referred to various constraints they felt had limited their capacity to fully achieve the targets. In addition to the difficulties of ensuring systematic and sustained monitoring, five SIT members and one non-SIT member saw time and time management as a serious problem. F voiced the views of the others when she said: 'time is a constraint; ...maybe about 20% of what we planned is not achieved'. D felt that there were 'too many activities to handle at once' while C and Y referred

to problems of staff turn-over and staff shortages. With the focus on promoting mixed ability teaching, it was felt that frequent staff changes and the need for inducting new staff caused serious disruptions. It means ‘you have to keep starting all over again’ (C). Additional paperwork involved in more detailed record keeping (U) and the lack of support from outside agencies and from the Ministry of Education (V) were also mentioned.

Nonetheless all respondents maintained that the development planning exercise was a most valuable one for their school, and they perceived direct links between that and improvements in the school. A seemed to summarised the general view when he said:

It brings people together and prevents them from working in isolation. The school evaluates its performance and sees where the weaknesses lie and try to improve. And all is aware of this process.

Evidence from observation of SIT meetings

The process and implementation of Development Planning

No reference of any kind was made to the development planning process in the first meeting observed. The second meeting, which dealt primarily with the evaluation of the 2006 action plans, implied the process having occurred.

The planned PD session discussed in the first meeting was related to one of the tasks in the year’s action plans, namely: ‘analyse assessment results intermittently and communicate results to students, teachers and parents, for improvement’. Clear

instructions on how this was to be done was given by the PDF. No other item on the agenda was connected to the implementation of the plan.

The second meeting was concerned entirely with evaluating the implementation of the development plan. A grid containing the tasks agreed upon for the year for each of the targets, was distributed to all members of the SIT and they proceeded to systematically evaluate each task, under the guidance of the PDF. The evaluation was done in terms of whether the task had been completed or not, the 'strengths in the implementation', 'weaknesses, and lessons to be learnt', 'impact on the school' and further action to be taken (Termly Evaluation Form for terms 1 & 2, 2006). This is a format proposed by the Ministry's Schools' Division. For each task completed the PDF asked for evidence related to the success criteria stated in the action plans. This involved a good deal of lively discussion and finally consensus on what was to be reported. The SIT managed to evaluate ten out of the eighteen tasks stated in the grid.

Effectiveness of Development Planning

The whole evaluation exercise in the second meeting was a means of assessing the effectiveness of the development plan. Members of the team seemed to approach it with openness and honesty. They discussed the tasks that had not or had only been partially completed and examined and noted the reasons for this. However, they stopped short of considering further actions to be taken to redress the situation. For the ten tasks discussed in the meeting, the section of the grid referring to 'Actions to be taken' was left blank. Perhaps it was to be discussed at a later stage in the process but this was not made clear.

Professional Development

The findings below are considered in terms of the format and types of PD activities organised, perceptions of PD and its impact on staff's thinking and practice.

Evidence from documentary analysis

The format and types of PD activities

According to the PDF's termly progress report, over the past six years the school organised a range of PD activities, involving all teaching staff and occasionally support staff as well. The activities took the form of whole school meetings, and working sessions in mixed groups or at departmental level. Examination of a 30% sample of the PD plans produced during this period indicated that two thirds of the sessions were organized in mixed groups and at whole school level, and one third at departmental level. 25% of the planned activities were directly associated with the process of development planning, such as the production of departmental action plans and the evaluation of the development plans. 20% of the sessions involved analysis of end of term examination results while 14% dealt with the development of the school's student behaviour policy. Sixteen out of a total of seventy three PD sessions (22%) were directly linked to teaching and learning. These included work on the development of materials for differentiated teaching, reflection on the best methods of recording students' achievements, and the development of performance indicators for mixed ability teaching.

The SI co-ordinator's termly progress reports along with the PDF's evaluation reports indicate that most of the planned activities were actually delivered. According to the SI co-ordinator's progress reports over the past four years the PD sessions were generally related to the school's targets. However, she noted that on a number of occasions when she assisted PD sessions, no evaluation was done of the effectiveness of the activities.

Over the years the school seemed to have become more self-reliant in facilitating PD sessions. Almost all the sessions were facilitated by staff from within the school; as the PDF explained in his evaluation reports, the costs involved in bringing in people from outside agencies – usually from the main island – were too high for the school to consider more than once a term.

Perceptions of PD, and its impact on people's thinking and practice

The school's yearly evaluation reports do not comment on the effectiveness of PD but this is probably because a separate evaluation report is done each term by the PDF. The reports provide an overview of the term's PD activities, and comment on the organisation of the sessions, teachers' responses and impact on the school. All the reports mention the positive outlook of the majority of teachers towards PD. In term one of 2004 the PDF remarked that all teachers saw the relevance of the PD activities but 'the major problem still lies in consistency in application. At first people try to apply what is learnt in PD but they gradually relent on the effort.' He recorded significant improvement by the end of 2004, noting that 'almost all departments reported an attempt by teachers to implement the ideas and skills learnt in PD sessions'. In term one of 2006 he attributed staff's commitment to PD to 'the

fact that most teachers see the relevance of PD not only in school development but also in their own professional growth'. It has to be noted that these reports may not be entirely objective in their findings, the PDF being the main person responsible for PD in the school, and therefore inclined to have a positive outlook on the activities he organised.

The QA evaluation report of 2002 and follow-up report of 2004 comment only briefly on PD. In 2002 the evaluation team identified as a key strength of the school the fact that it

...had made remarkable progress in developing a culture of professional sharing. There was a firm commitment to professional development and teachers, irrespective of specializations, accepted to facilitate sessions and take the lead in exploring solutions to common problems. (Ministry of Education, 2002: 13)

The second QA report took note of a number of PD activities that had been organised to support the school's main target of implementing differentiated teaching, but the conclusions about a lack of evidence for such teaching in the classrooms the QA team observed, implied that the PD sessions had limited impact.

Findings from interviews

The format and types of Professional Development activities

All respondents agreed that the PD plan was based on the school's development plan, and that the professional development needs of staff were identified through whole school discussion at the start of each term, in line with the action plans to be implemented. They also explained that the plan was put together by the PDF at the start of each term and the final version had to be approved by the SIT. PD activities could take the form of 'workshops, discussion groups, sensitization sessions' (C and

Y) and ‘even outings’ (Z), at whole school or departmental levels. According to B and D most of the time the school called on in-house facilitators because guest speakers, as pointed out by B, ‘usually come from Mahe (the main island) and this tends to be costly.’

There was general agreement that occasionally the planned activity had to be changed, sometimes at short notice. All SIT members confirmed that the PD programme for each Wednesday was discussed in the SIT meeting the previous day and the final programme was placed on the staffroom notice board on the Wednesday morning.

Perceptions of PD

All interviewees seemed to have a clear understanding of the process used in the organization of PD and they felt involved in it, as V explained: ‘the plan is based on the expressed needs of teachers, determined through a needs analysis exercise we do with the PDF’. All SIT members were of the view that teachers had accepted the idea of school-based PD activities and that ‘they participated readily’(C), they were ‘a willing team’ (D), even if sometimes ‘the sessions went on for too long’ (A). Five non SIT members also stated that the idea was accepted generally but expressed less enthusiasm than SIT members: ‘...a few teachers still resent it and take this time for their appointments outside the school’ (Z). W gave the following description:

There’s a special PD face people put on (on Wednesday afternoons), but in general they do participate, and the organisers do try to finish early. But the complaints are always there. People feel they’re being forced, and so they resent it.

According to almost all interviewees, the type of activity organized also influenced teachers' perceptions of PD. Three SIT members thought that staff preferred activities which they perceived to 'have direct links with what goes on in the classroom' (D). E felt that 'activities that teachers (had) come up with themselves worked well, and those related to current issues in the school'. B, on the other hand, believed that teachers 'welcomed the idea of sessions with outside speakers; likewise, they liked doing activities at department level.'

Three non SIT members, agreed with B that teachers enjoyed sessions by outside speakers, as X explained: 'when outside people come and make lively presentations it's good; we can then act like students.' X along with U and W, also mentioned that 'discussions in small groups, at departmental level' (X and U), and 'practical, hands-on activities' (W) got people engaged and kept them awake. Lecture style presentations (F, U, W, Y, Z), hours of analysis of exam results (B), activities imposed by the process of development planning (A and E) were cited by these various respondents as 'boring' and 'tedious'.

The main contentious issue for all respondents was the timing of PD activities. Everyone felt that mid-afternoon, weekly, after a long day in the classroom was not the ideal time. 'Teachers are tired after school' (C) was a comment reiterated by all the others, with A, V and W adding that at times the sessions went on past four o'clock. 'People are not happy although they stay on' (V). D was the only person who thought that 'teachers (needed) to change their attitudes towards the time' as a means of accepting the idea.

A number of suggestions were made as possible alternatives to the timing and organization of PD activities. E, F, Y and Z proposed starting earlier in the afternoon while U and X preferred the morning ‘when people would be fresh and probably more willing to work’ (U). W suggested moving school-based PD activities out of the school term schedule altogether, setting them instead for one or two whole days at the start or end of school holidays. All those who made alternative proposals said they had occasionally voiced these suggestions at school level meetings but nothing had changed. The SMT members acknowledged the teachers’ views on this issue, and they also expressed reservation about the timing of PD activities, but they perceived difficulties in possible change. A and C wondered ‘how it could be done differently in the circumstances’ and B could not envisage any change ‘because of problems related to organising the children out of class’.

The impact of PD

There was unanimous agreement that PD activities had, in various ways, influenced the perceptions of most teachers and occasionally, their practice. With regard to the implementation of the behaviour policy and PD sessions held in relation to it, four SIT members and five non SIT members noted changes in teachers’ and students’ attitudes and improvements in the environment of the school. B, C and D claimed to have noticed ‘more positive interactions between staff and students’ (B), while F thought that ‘through some of the PD sessions we’ve come to consider problems of behaviour from a different angle’. The promotion of a set of ‘living values’, she felt, had helped to bring about this change; X and Z also shared this view. B noted that ‘teachers seemed to be handling the behaviour cases themselves’ because she

received fewer referrals than before. A, C and F mentioned that there were fewer instances of fights amongst students, and A, D, Y and Z believed this was at least partly the effect of the work of the newly revived students' committee.

PD sessions on differentiated teaching and learning were also considered to have brought changes in teachers' thinking and practice. Three SIT members and four non SIT members maintained that some teachers did try to put into practice the techniques learnt during PD sessions but readily accepted that many others did not do so in a consistent manner:

The implementation in the classroom does not always happen as planned, for example, organizing classes into groups sometimes does not happen at all. Maybe they don't always see the need, and they need time to reflect and consider change. Then there is also staff movement as a problem. (C)

B noted 'more positive remarks in students' exercise books' while W observed that 'materials that have been developed (during PD) are used in the classroom, but Y was more cautious about trying out new strategies:

I've tried some of the activities introduced through PD myself, but it takes time for students to adapt to new strategies; for example, the use of relaxation techniques, the ideas were good, but students simply fooled around when we tried them.

The question of sustaining all such efforts was raised by E who made the following observation with reference to the rule of fining students whose appearance was disheveled:

Everyone enforced it to begin with, all were enthusiastic, but then we let it slip. People are not consistent, and things are not sustained. Maybe this sort of thing is also in our culture: we try to implement things, but then some don't make the effort and the whole thing gets left.

A considered these problems as being related to monitoring of teachers' performance, and as a consequence he felt that little had changed:

Maybe this is because we are not monitoring enough, for example, we are tackling mixed ability teaching and so we did sessions on differentiated learning. but only some

teachers try. Others don't bother. And there has been no follow up session on this as yet.

Except for the SMT members all other interviewees asserted that their own thinking and practice had changed as a result of the PD activities. F believed she had altered the traditional approach she began with: 'now I open up more to students; I discuss issues with them, I consider them as partners in the learning process, and they respond well to this'. E claimed that he tried 'to apply grouping principles' learned from PD workshops. All non SIT members also stated that they applied the new strategies acquired through PD in their classrooms, in their attempts to cater for all ability groups. V and W said they had come to realise the importance of teamwork, and adopting more differentiated strategies in class, whereas U and Y mentioned in particular the sessions on behaviour management which had helped them 'to handle students who have discipline problems' (Y). However, it must be noted that this self-reported evidence is somewhat contradicted by the comments of A, C and Y (reported above).

All respondents considered PD as an important aspect of school life and were unanimous in their belief that it should be retained, although in a format better suited to the needs and circumstances of all concerned. They specified a number of reasons:

- it provides opportunities to reflect on practice, to find better ways of doing things, and to share. (A)
- It brings awareness of the achievement of our common vision and gives us a point of focus. (C)

- They provide us with opportunities to voice our opinions and share our thoughts. (U)
- It's a way to get staff to know each other, to share ideas and work together. There are no other opportunities for us to do that at the moment. (Y)

Evidence from observation of SIT meetings

The format and types of Professional Development activities

Professional development activities were on the agenda of both SIT meetings observed. As a general rule, it was explained to the researcher, the programme for each week's session was presented and discussed in the SIT meeting the day before.

In the first meeting the PDF presented the plan for the following day's session. He gave very clear and precise details. The session was to be held at department level, and it involved the analysis of examination results (of students' mid-term assessment) by year level, to determine students' progress. Each department was expected to present the results of the analysis in the following week's PD session. However, circumstances typical of a small, close-knit community (attendance of the funeral of a relative of a member of staff, coinciding with PD time) were going to interfere with this planned session; it was therefore decided to carry out the analysis during the weekly departmental meetings so that the presentation could still be done the following week.

In the second meeting it was decided that the continuation of the development plan evaluation exercise should involve all staff and would constitute the following day's PD session.

Perception of PD and its impact on people's thinking and practice

No direct reference was made to any of the aspects of PD considered here in either of the two meetings observed. Generally, however, the SIT seemed to proceed under the assumption that the PD activities discussed or alluded to would have the desired impact. For instance, the evaluation of the school development plan exercise, started in the second meeting observed, assumed that the PD sessions held to facilitate the achievement of the set targets had met their objectives.

Perceptions of Leadership

This section presents perceptions of the actual leadership style in the school. Comments on the possible effects of the smallness of the system on the SIP are also included where relevant.

Evidence from documentary analysis

In the most recent development plan (2006 – 2008), a section of the school's audit examines the strengths and weaknesses of the following areas of leadership: leadership style, visioning, time management, capacity building, effective communication, curriculum leadership, monitoring of teaching and learning and induction of new staff. It identified the following strengths:

- the school management leads various teams and promotes a shared vision
- management team promotes good practice and are a source of inspiration for others
- management team leads in professional development and involves all stakeholders in the process
- management seeks to effectively communicate with all stakeholders

- management is knowledgeable about what goes on in the classroom
- improvement targets are set and linked to teacher appraisal, and teaching and learning are systematically monitored
- new staff are acquainted with school's development plan and there is an induction policy.

The school's audit report also noted that the management experienced difficulty in sustaining an effective process for monitoring teaching and learning. Establishing partnerships with feeder schools and with parents were also considered as areas of concern.

The QA external evaluation report of 2002 also noted as a key strength of the school:

...a closely knit management team which provided strong, committed leadership and a good model of team work. Members knew their school and their community and put this knowledge to good use. (Ministry of Education, *ibid*: 13)

Since the publication of the QA report there was a change of headteacher and deputy head for curriculum in January 2003. Both persons had been in the school for many years prior to their promotions.

Findings from interviews

Consultation, collaboration, dialogue, co-operation, involvement of others in decision making, characterised the types of comments made by all interviewees. In addition, A gave his view of how the present leadership operated:

We listen to others, without being *laissez faire*, we give reasons behind actions. In PD we encourage debate and then come to a consensus. We try to use best practice as much as possible.

All the other participants expressed their appreciation of the present leadership style, in various forms, but five people also expressed certain reservations. E, U, W, Y and Z believed the leadership should display a greater level of firmness towards staff as well as students. E and Y felt that some people took advantage of the openness of the situation, by often absenting themselves from the school, knowing that no sanctions would be applied. Y further linked the leadership style to discipline problems: 'So the expected results do not happen, and there is no continuity in the actions we take'. She gave the example of the rule instituted with regard to students' grooming, where dishevelled appearances occasioned a fine. 'We started it and kept to it for a while and then it gradually stopped' and, she implied, nothing more happened. U, Y and Z wanted to see more firmness with students, and greater consistency in actions taken by the management. Y described some of the issues of concern to her:

They're (the management) friendly; they treat teachers as professionals, but people sometimes take advantage of this, and so the leadership then seems too lenient. Things are always generalised; people causing problems are never approached directly and so the problems are not solved.

Z held a similar view on the problem of firmness: 'I like the collaboration and the openness, ...but sometimes you want the head to be more firm to tackle the slackness, but he doesn't do it in the way you expect'. V and W also felt there was a need for more effective communication, 'where information is communicated on time' (W) and where 'the leadership is prepared to listen' (V).

On the issue of opportunities open to staff to take the lead in the school, all respondents agreed that such possibilities were readily available, and the SMT believed they encouraged and supported staff to lead in many different ways. All the others agreed on this last point, and gave several examples of instances when

they had taken the lead. These included the setting up and running of clubs, the organization of student outings and student participation in national events, small scale action research projects, and facilitating PD sessions, among others.

The SMT also commented on the possible effects of the small size of the community. They referred to positive aspects, related to ease of communication with parents, accessibility of the management and staff even from outside of the school, and the community's readiness to assist the school in a variety of ways. On the negative side they pointed to some parents' poor perceptions of certain teachers, based on personal knowledge or impressions that could be damaging to the teachers, as B explained:

Parents may not come to the school because they feel all is fine here. They may also come to criticise the behaviour of certain teachers outside the school, and this can reflect badly on teachers and on the school.

Evidence from observation of SIT meetings

No overt reference was made to leadership issues at either of the SIT meetings observed, but the proceedings of the meetings implied certain power dynamics that gave some indication of the leadership style in the school.

The two main persons who led the meetings were the deputy head for curriculum (DHC) and the PDF. The meetings were held in the headteacher's office and he also attended. The DHC presented the agenda in each meeting, and although it was acknowledged that the minutes of the previous meeting had not been produced, no-one was designated to carry out this task for the current meeting.

The first meeting dealt with departments' assessment plans for the end of term examinations, and a meeting to be organised with the parents of final year students. On the latter point, a good deal of vague discussion took place that could have been curtailed by the chairperson having some specific information about the anticipated number of parents, and possible timing. Finally the head remarked that such meetings used to happen after school, and perhaps this should be maintained. Similarly for the assessment plans: after protracted debate about deadlines and formats, an intervention by the head made clear that this whole issue was a routine matter that happened at the end of each term. It was as if discussion and consultation had to be seen to be happening rather than being genuinely necessary. The head tended to hover on the edge of the meeting and intervened only occasionally, it seemed, as a means of altering the course of actions.

The second meeting was led by the PDF. He seemed well prepared, supplying everyone with the appropriate documents, and he proceeded promptly and confidently with the evaluation exercise through clear and direct questions, addressed sometimes to the whole group, sometimes to individual HoDs, depending on the tasks. He probed and asked for evidence when vague assertions were made. The head commented only twice during this meeting, criticising teachers' attitudes and practices, and his remarks seemed to be addressed to HoDs rather than to the PDF who was chairing the meeting.

Summary

The school has been consistent in the statement of its vision and the values it upholds. The targets set clearly reflect its stated vision, which in a general way, also

guides the implementation of the plans. However, the practices of the teaching staff in particular, as supported by documentary evidence, suggest that the vision is not being lived by the whole school.

Staff felt involved at all stages in the development planning process. They expressed commitment to the implementation of the plans, and in general, supported and collaborated with the SIT in the management of the plans. However, implementation processes did not seem to be consistently applied across departments, and although the SIT appears to be well aware of this, no corrective actions occur. The monitoring of the implementation of the action plans seemed to be a major problem throughout the past six years.

Professional development seemed to have become accepted as a strong element in the process of school improvement. Staff felt fully involved in the planning of PD activities and their willingness to participate in, as well as to facilitate, PD sessions was considered as strengths by all involved. Nonetheless, school-based evidence on improved teaching strategies and student performance remains inconclusive, and the impact of PD activities on classroom practice is difficult to ascertain.

Except for the SMT, perceptions of leadership seemed to be mainly in terms of the authority of the headteacher. The consultative and collaborative form of leadership was favoured by all respondents, but about half of them noted a lack of firmness, while others wished for greater consistency in actions taken. Still, there was general appreciation for the openness shown by the SMT and the encouragement staff received in taking the lead in school activities.

Chapter Eight: Case Study 4 – Albizia Secondary School

Introduction

This is an urban school, situated close to the town centre. At the beginning of 2006 the student population was 796, with almost equal numbers of boys and girls. In addition to the three members of the SMT, there were 51 teaching staff and 19 support staff. At the time of the study in September 2006, the head and one deputy had been in the school for almost two years, whereas the other deputy had been there since January 2002. All members of the SMT had at least 4 years experience in senior management positions.

From January 2006 a new SIT was established to manage the implementation of the school's third development plan for 2006 – 2008. The team, led by the PDF, comprised the SMT and five newly selected teacher representatives.

The sections that follow group together the data collected in the same manner as for the previous three case studies. The interviewees were two HoDs and four teachers as non-SIT members; the SMT, the PDF and two teacher representatives on the SIT.

The school's vision

Evidence from the analysis of documents

The first two development plans give a slightly different version of the school's vision, entitled 'vision/values', under which are listed fourteen statements of intent

such as ‘to promote a safe learning environment’ and ‘to guide students to be responsible citizens’, without there being a coherent ideal encapsulated by these statements. Apart from two statements which refer to a school ‘where everyone works together’ and one which ‘promotes good living values’, none of the others expressed values.

The third plan has, for the vision, a statement which reads more like a motto: ‘To learn is to grow in all ways’. Below this are listed twenty six statements of intent referring to students, staff, parents and the wider community. They range from ‘raise expectations’ and ‘demand high standards’ to ‘respond to the needs of each child’ and ‘involve the community as partners in learning’ (Development Plan 2006 – 2008: 2). These statements do not appear to amount to a clear conceptualisation of the kind of school being aspired to. The vision statements being so broad and disparate, every target contained in the development plans almost automatically linked up with the vision.

The QA evaluation team (May 2005), however, was of the opinion that the vision and values statement of the 2003-2005 development plan ‘conveyed a clear message about the type of school the staff wanted to create’ (Ministry of Education, 2005: 12). This is not borne out by the responses of staff interviewed in this study. A summary of their perceptions of the school’s vision is given below.

Findings from interviews

There was a marked difference between the views expressed by SIT members and those of non SIT members. SIT members paraphrased (A, B and F) or quoted (D

and E) from working school documents they said was the known version of the vision statement: 'Generally ours is a values-based school, and this involves three main partners: teachers/ staff, students and parents. We aim to achieve highly in all aspects of school life'. (However, none of the development plans produced by the school, or any of the other documents consulted by the researcher, carried this particular statement.) C was the only one who did not mention values; she took a broader focus on 'the full development of students, the development of the whole person through all aspects of schooling'.

The non SIT members stated that they were aware of the school's vision contained in the development plans, but they could not recollect exactly what it said. They did not mention values as such, but spoke more broadly of aspirations related to bringing about 'positive changes in students' attitudes and behaviour' (U and V) and 'the full development of students' (U and W). X and Y saw the vision as being more concerned with improving students' academic achievements through effective teaching, whereas Z suggested attaining this through developing 'an environment conducive to learning'. V mentioned that in previous years 'for earlier plans, the statement used to be displayed in the staffroom', but not anymore.

There were mixed reactions to the question of whether the vision influenced the way people worked in the school. A and B thought the vision was shared, 'at least at the level of the school management' according to B. C, E and F agreed that awareness fluctuated:

At the beginning when we first started working on the plan, there was a lot of awareness raising, but this has not really been sustained although these things always remain at the back of our minds. (C)

From among non SIT members, all except X maintained that people were generally aware of the vision and of the 'need to improve' (U). However, no-one affirmed or explained in any way how it influenced their practice. D and X thought that the vision had no effect on staff anyway. They both saw the problem as being a lack of commitment: 'many teachers are not committed' (X); 'there seems to be a lack of a sense of belonging, people show no real commitment' (D). D also noted that frequent staff movement aggravated the situation.

Evidence from observation of SIT meetings

At the time of the interviews, (September - October 2005), the SIT was not functional. An ad hoc team comprising the SMT, the PDF and one or two co-opted teachers, were in the process of compiling the evaluation report for the development plan ending December 2005 and developing a new plan for 2006 - 2008. A new SIT was appointed at the beginning of 2006 to manage the implementation of the new plan. Consequently the researcher moved on to other schools and returned to Albizia School in November 2006 for the SIT meeting observations. This, it is felt, does not prejudice the findings of this case study, as the role of the SIT did not change and a core of SIT members have remained on the present team, namely the SMT members and the PDF who still leads the team. Perhaps this also serves to illustrate the dynamic nature of the processes being observed and studied.

No direct or indirect reference was made to the school's vision in either of the meetings observed. Both meetings were almost totally concerned with the evaluation of the action plans implemented during 2006. It could be argued that all

discussions that took place implied working towards the school's vision, since all the targets set were linked to it.

Development Planning

The school had so far implemented two development plans (2000 – 2002; 2003 – 2005) and it started on a new one in January 2006. For each of the plans the SMTs involved in their production did not see them through. There were changes of heads, at least one of the deputies and PDFs every two years between 2000 and 2005. There was no PDF appointed for about nine months of 2004.

This section presents evidence on the process of development planning used, the implementation of the plans and changes and achievements that may be attributed to development planning in the school.

Evidence from documentary analysis

The process of Development Planning

The three development plans are generally clear and they closely follow the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education. Each one carries a detailed audit report which forms the basis for the selection of priority areas for action. The audit for the first plan seemed to have involved consultation with teaching staff mainly, although three departments mentioned having sought students' views on teaching effectiveness and behaviour. The SMT also did an analysis of their strengths and weaknesses and the results of all the audits culminated in about 25 action plans to be implemented at department as well as at whole school level. Neither the 2000

development plan nor the school's evaluation reports give any indication as to how these various activities might be synchronised and the results brought together. Success criteria for each target were generally stated in vague terms and were not measurable. Consequently it is difficult to ascertain the effectiveness of the planning process.

The second development plan (2003 – 2005) includes even greater details of the audit process, although there is little evidence of reflection on teachers' classroom practice, as observed by the 2005 QA report:

The initial stage of the audit did not provide much opportunity for teachers to reflect deeply on their own teaching. Concerns relating to teaching had not been picked up (early on) ...hence weaknesses relating to teaching were very few and lacking in precision. (ibid: 12)

To a large extent the focus seemed to be on students' shortcomings and their lack of interest. That teachers' performance gave cause for concern was apparent from a report included in the appendices to the 2003 development plan, based on interviews and observations of six students in six different classes, carried out as part of the auditing process in 2003. (There was no indication of who led this exercise). The report, entitled 'Results of Pupil Data Collection', stated that there was very little group work activity in any of the classes, no differentiated teaching of any kind, poor time management and unsatisfactory conclusions to lessons. One of its conclusions is that in all six classes 'teachers did not have high expectations' of students whatever their ability.

However, the content of this report does not seem to have influenced the audit exercise. The QA evaluation report (2005: 12) notes that 'Valuable information

obtained from the results of the student data collection had not been taken into account'. Only one target addressed the issue of effective teaching, stated broadly as follows: 'reinforce the national curriculum requirements to meet students' needs through lesson planning' and the main activity was to 'prepare activities and lesson plans to suit different ability groups'. Since, according to the QA evaluation report (2005) 'no plans of action had been drawn up at departmental level, or within other groups making up the school community to support the whole school plan' (ibid: 13), it is uncertain whether this target was addressed.

There seemed to be a slight shift of focus in the 2006–2008 development plan towards improving teaching and learning, with two targets aiming to 'strengthen the structures for monitoring teaching and learning' and 'encourage different groupings and differentiated learning'. There also seemed to be greater coherence between the whole school action plans and the departmental action plans.

Implementation of Development Planning

According to the school's evaluation and the SI co-ordinators' annual progress reports, the main structures in place for monitoring the implementation of action plans are the SIT and the SMT. The school has several monitoring plans but its yearly evaluation reports (2002-2005) do not comment on their effectiveness, except for brief remarks on the achievement of the 2004 targets: 'too many activities planned' and 'regular change in management'. The school's evaluation reports for the same three-year period indicated that several targets were not met, even when they were carried over from one year to the next. This was confirmed by the SI co-ordinators' progress reports, which observed repeatedly that the school

had produced several guidelines and policies - in particular the behaviour management and the homework policies - but their implementation remained problematic. The SI co-ordinators kept on reporting: 'monitoring of the plan is not being done systematically' (2003 and 2004 SIP progress reports).

The QA 2005 evaluation report also draws attention to such concerns. It found a lack of appropriate documentation that might have 'enabled the management to follow up on issues more effectively' (Ministry of Education, 2005: 13). As a result 'initiatives adopted by the school were considered to frequently lose their momentum through lack of effective follow-up' (ibid). For the QA team one major concern was that 'staff in general, demonstrated a lack of enthusiasm and commitment to the selected priorities, and believed that the strategies adopted to achieve those priorities were often ineffective' (ibid: 13).

The SI co-ordinators reported (in 2003, 2004 and 2005) on the 'reluctance of HODs to take up the challenge of monitoring the plans'. While noting slight improvements towards the end of 2005 and in 2006, they still expressed concern at the irregularity of monitoring activities and the disparities in perceptions between themselves and the HoDs. Their classroom observations suggested that teaching/ learning activities were not 'matching and meeting students' needs' (this is one of the school's targets for 2005), but the HODs reported that they were 'satisfied with the quality of planning' (SI co-ordinator's report, term 3, 2005). Better team work between HODs and heads of year was observed in 2006, along with more systematic monitoring of the implementation of action plans.

The Effectiveness of Development Planning

The 2000 and 2003 development plans focused more or less on the same targets, namely the promotion of 'living values', the development and implementation of a behaviour management policy, the implementation of a homework policy and adaptation of the curriculum to better respond to the needs of all learners at year one level. The evaluation reports for the 2000 development plan suggest that few of the targets were achieved and hence the extension of these targets into the second plan. The 2003 evaluations claim a measure of success in that 'students were sensitised to the living values' and more responsible behaviour was observed around the school for a time in 2005. 'Students were more careful about their behaviour which has led to a decrease in major misbehaviours' (SDP Evaluation report, 2005). As for the behaviour policy, both the school's and the SI co-ordinators' evaluations came to similar conclusions:

School policies and guidelines are in place but the implementation had not been undertaken/ sustained. (SIP progress report, term 3, 2005)

The behaviour policy has been completed and the steps for dealing with behaviour cases have been established. However, implementation of policy needs to be consistent so that its effectiveness can be tested. (School's SDP evaluation report, 2005)

Findings from interviews

The process of development planning

Five of the six SIT members had not been in the school when the 2003 plan was developed, but all six non SIT members were there. Therefore the latter outlined in greater detail the process used in the development of the 2003 plan while the former

focused on the 2006 plan. However, all respondents were aware of the change in the process used for the development of the 2006 plan.

All non SIT members recounted the procedures in greater or lesser detail as described by E:

There was brainstorming at SIT level and then consultation with departments. They had to collect statistics and other information related to areas of concern, and then the SIT together with senior management decided on a number of priorities based on agreed ratings. The SIT developed the plan and the final writing of the plan was done by the PDF and the secretary of the SIT.

Y added that following the compilation of the plan, ‘the departments then (had) various components to work on’, but he did not specify how this was done and no-one mentioned the development of action plans at department level.

The school decided to change the process for the 2006 plan because, according to A, they had just received the results of the QA evaluation in August 2005, where several areas of concern had been highlighted. Using QA themes - ie. ‘Teaching and learning, management, and student support’ – she explained that ‘audits were carried out at the level of each department and (the) priorities were selected on the basis of the results of these two exercises’. Prioritising was done ‘in consultation with staff through a whole school session’ (A).

B, C, D, F, U and Z also mentioned that the QA evaluation results served as the basis for the departmental auditing and that the QA findings had been discussed in a recent whole staff meeting. E, Y and W however, did not refer to this change in the auditing process, whereas V and X remarked on changes but in terms of auditing

‘being done through a whole school meeting’ (X), and the SIT now being smaller: ‘not all departments are represented’ (V).

Implementation of Development Planning

All respondents seemed to refer to processes which should have happened rather than what actually occurred in the school. They all agreed that monitoring and evaluation of action plans were the responsibilities of the SMT, the SIT and HoDs at departmental level, but they were rather vague about how these processes happened. A was the only one who gave details of quite elaborate monitoring structures and processes that apparently were in place. She mentioned monitoring plans at department and whole school levels which guided the process; weekly and fortnightly meetings with HoDs and heads of year; analysis of documentation from the various departments including minutes of their weekly meetings; and regular meetings with student bodies such as prefects and peer counsellors. D also vaguely alluded to ‘meetings with HoDs and (checking) records of departmental meetings’. The only point of agreement between A and other interviewees, was that ‘monitoring at departmental level was the responsibility of HoDs’.

The role of HoDs and the effectiveness of the implementation processes were discussed by U, X and Y, who seemed to refer to the realities of the school rather than what might be. U explained that while there was a monitoring plan for the whole school action plans, ‘at department level, in principle we should have had one as well but it didn’t actually get done.’ X and Y both felt that ‘follow-up with regard to the implementation and effectiveness of the plans’ (X) was problematic:

It is the responsibility of the HoDs ...(but) in my department, for example, no specific evaluation of the plan was done, most of the time there were no departmental meetings

anyway. I find out about the achievements of students through the interviews that are done as part of the careers counseling process. (X)

HoDs oversee and monitor the action plans, and they give feedback to senior management and to the staff. But the feedback doesn't seem to result in recommendations for further action; there are complaints, they are not followed up and so nothing more happens. (Y)

Y also mentioned a number of constraints such as 'too much being handled at once', staff shortages and role conflicts facing HoDs. He referred to his own experience: 'when I was HoD, I sometimes experienced some role conflict – on the one hand exhorting people to do things, on the other hand seeing too well the constraints we were facing.' None of the other respondents commented on these issues.

The Effectiveness of Development Planning

Only F and W thought that development planning had worked quite well in the school. F believed 'there was consultation at various levels and teachers seemed to appreciate some of the activities that were carried out'. Even if monitoring was 'a bit weak' W felt that 'to some extent the process has worked well'.

The other ten interviewees felt that the plans had not worked so well for a number of reasons. C, V, Y and Z considered the problems of monitoring as the main reason for the limited achievement of the targets in the 2003 plan; consequently initiatives taken at the start of the planning period lost momentum along the way and were often abandoned. C gave the example of activities promoting living values 'which worked well for a term in the second year of the plan, but then (they) ceased, largely through lack of monitoring'. V describes a similar type of pattern:

Things start off well, we set the targets and all agree, but then people let go; they slacken on the monitoring, a few give up and nothing happens, and generally things stop. Monitoring really does not work. (V)

Frequent changes at management level was seen as a serious drawback to continuity of planning and implementation. According to D, 'since 1999 there have been three different heads and new members of the management teams. Many staff members have been transferred'. E noted that 'there have been three PDFs over the course of the last planning cycle and the present one' and A observed that 'the change of leadership halfway through the last plan didn't help, but we did try to make it work'.

In spite of the many drawbacks almost all participants claimed that changes and improvements related to development planning had occurred. C and E thought there had been 'improvements in lesson planning and delivery' (C), although C also mentioned that additional materials developed by teachers for mixed ability teaching, had been used by very few people in the language departments only. C, E, F, U and X mentioned the homework policy: 'we've seen some improvement in homework completion at S1 and S2' (X). B, C, F, U, V and X referred to improvements in student behaviour that they associated with the school's implementation of a behaviour policy and promotion of living values. D, however, countered these assertions with the following comment: 'If there's been changes it might be at the level of policy development but the implementation of these policies have not been very extensive at all'.

They all maintained that the development planning process was a worthwhile one.

V's reasons for having the plans aptly summarise the views of the other five non

SIT members:

Without them (the plans) we may have done even worse, because, with a plan, when things do not work so well, you can refer people back to the plan, you have a guide for change, and you can remind them of what was agreed on.

SIT members agree that the development plans were a necessary tool for bringing about improvements within the school. A and C believed they helped the school 'to become more focussed...(providing) a clearer sense of direction' (A); 'you need some sort of plan to guide actions that need to take place, but people have to follow the agreed plan' (C). However, considering the lack of effective monitoring described above, such views can only remain impressionistic.

On the question of links between development planning and improvement in schools, three SIT members and two non SIT members said there were, but the other seven respondents were doubtful. They all explained that 'in principle there should be' but they seemed to agree with D's and Y's conclusions: 'but we've still to see it happen in this school' (D); 'but in reality it's not that clear to see' (Y).

Evidence from observation of SIT meetings

The process and implementation of development planning

No direct reference was made to the development planning process in either of the meetings observed, but since their main focus was to evaluate the implementation of the action plans in 2006, the process that had been followed was implied. In the

first meeting the PDF explained that new action plans would need to be developed for aspects of targets not achieved during the current period. Implementation of the evaluation process was also discussed, with responsibilities for reporting being allocated to various members of the team, according to an agreed schedule.

In the second meeting the headteacher reported on the achievements of two targets worked on by the SMT, and she invited other members present to comment and add other information. None was forthcoming, but the group agreed that the report gave an accurate summary of the achievements. It outlined the results of actions taken with regard to providing regular and accessible information on pupils' progress and school achievement to parents and teachers. The report drew on school records and the outcomes of various meetings.

Effectiveness of Development Planning

The purpose of the evaluation exercise itself was to check on the effectiveness of the first year action plans. Two SMT and one other SIT members expressed the view that most of the action plans had been successfully implemented. One target was to be carried over to the next year and a few new action plans may need to be developed. While everyone seemed to be in general agreement with these conclusions, one SMT member pointed out that there were some issues related to the targets which the school had little control over. Staff shortages and a considerable number of untrained teachers in the school were the major ones highlighted, and as a consequence the team felt that tasks which presupposed effective teaching were doomed to failure at the outset. This resigned attitude seemed to be common to all present.

In the second meeting evidence presented to support the claim that parent participation had improved slightly came mainly from the SMT's meetings with parents. The PDF sought to clarify whether the number of parents attending meetings had increased or whether the same parents as in the previous year were participating more in the meetings. The headteacher confirmed it was the latter. It was then agreed that a new action plan would be developed for this to be properly achieved.

Professional Development

The findings below are considered in terms of the format and types of PD activities organised, perceptions of PD and its impact on staff's thinking and practice.

Evidence from documentary analysis

The format and types of Professional Development activities

The PD plans and the PDF's termly evaluation reports show that a wide range of PD activities were organised over the past six years. There has been a gradual shift from whole school sessions (about two thirds of the activities from 2001 to 2003) to only department-based sessions in 2006. Examination of a 30% sample of the PD plans produced during the period 2003 to 2006 indicated that only about 22% of the planned activities were directly linked to teaching and learning. These included work on the development of materials for differentiated learning for class work as well as for homework, devising a lesson planning format and developing assessment guidelines. The rest were devoted to development planning activities

(20%), school policy development (15%), personal enrichment programmes such as introductions to living values, stress management and adult learning (23%), and a range of administrative activities.

The SI co-ordinators' termly progress reports as well as the PDF's evaluation reports for the same period (2003 – 2006) included a number of observations about PD in the school. In 2003 and 2004 the SI co-ordinators found that most of the activities planned were at whole school level, although the few sessions they observed involved departmental group discussions on aspects of the development planning process. All the reports indicated that most of the sessions planned actually took place, with some adjustments being made during the term, often to accommodate outside facilitators. The PDF's reports note that the majority of PD sessions were facilitated by SIT members or other staff from within the school.

Perceptions of PD, and its impact on people's thinking and practice

Three of the SI co-ordinators' reports (2003 – 2004) noted the reluctance of HoDs 'to take up the role of facilitators within their departments' (SIP progress report, term 1, 2003) and each time they recommended that HoDs are given 'support and encouragement to take up the challenge of PD within their own departments' (ibid). The SI co-ordinators doubted the effectiveness of the department-based PD arrangement, remarking that the informal setting of the school's crowded staffroom was 'not conducive to the seriousness of the sessions' (SIP progress report, Term 1, 2006). They also expressed concern about the monitoring of the activities across departments.

The PDF's evaluation report for term 1, 2006 gives details of the activities organised by each department and the HoDs' comments. They all reported that teachers were happier with this new arrangement, as expressed in this comment from the maths department: 'most teachers agreed that since the PD sessions were directly related to teaching and learning they felt more positive about them'. However, a closer check of the activities reveals that most of the PD sessions, in every department, dealt with administrative issues related to teaching and learning, which used to be discussed in the weekly departmental meetings (as gleaned from past minutes of department meetings). The topics of discussion ranged from specification tables for assessment (science), the organisation of field trips (social science), to the preparation and analysis of a diagnostic test in maths. There seemed to be no clear focus on a specific area for development which might have been followed through in a number of sessions. Rarely did two consecutive meetings deal with the same issues. Most of the meetings were facilitated by the HoDs, except for maths and the languages where other teachers were involved as well.

There was no comment on the role of the SMT in the implementation of PD activities, except for one remark in the PDF's evaluation report (term 1, 2004), noting 'the lack of participation and support of management in PD sessions to reinforce issues being presented to staff'. That a shared understanding of the significance of PD was lacking was also observed by the QA evaluation team (2005) who reported that 'there were contradictory views' (ibid: 7) about PD:

On the one hand a high proportion of teachers agreed that professional development time was used effectively, but on the other hand their comments revealed that they did not value professional development sessions. They qualified (them) as repetitive and unproductive.

Findings from interviews

The format and types of professional development activities

All respondents explained that there was consultation and discussion at department level prior to the PD plans being drawn up. The needs thus identified were then considered by the SIT and the SMT, and a final plan for each term was developed by the PDF. They all mentioned that PD activities took place weekly, on Wednesdays, and depending on their nature, they could be held at department level or whole school. However, these descriptions seemed to relate more to what they expected should happen rather than what actually took place. At the time of these interviews, (term 3, 2005) almost all PD activities were happening at department level, for reasons explained by A:

To begin with ... the management proposed certain areas for PD to focus on, but as teachers had very mixed reactions to this, we suggested at the beginning of 2005 that each department identified their own training needs and decided as to how PD could be planned based on these. This worked better and teachers participated with more enthusiasm.

This was confirmed by W, the only other person who mentioned the change to departmental sessions: 'Now most of the sessions happen at departmental level and we have more say in what is done'. X and Z however, pointed to other difficulties, where PD activities did not happen as planned:

But this (the departmental and whole school sessions) was earlier on; this term there has been only one PD session... This was during the QA visit, but since then there has been no PD sessions as such at school or departmental levels. (Z)

But there again, at departmental level, the group activities do not always happen. For instance sessions had been planned on each living value, over a period of time, by groups from each department, and then some groups had not prepared properly and certain sessions didn't happen. (X)

Perceptions of PD

A hoped that with the departmental action plans developed alongside the new development plan (2006 – 2008), the PD plans should be more closely linked to departmental and whole school priorities. Only two other respondents, C and D, pointed to connections between the school priorities and targets, and the PD plans. According to them the PD plans were ‘drawn up in line with the targets set in the development plan and based on the stated needs of staff’ (C), ‘in line with the priorities of the school’ (D). The others seemed to discuss PD in the light of it being one more activity stipulated by the Ministry.

D seemed quite categorical in his assertion that ‘generally teachers don’t like PD’, although he pointed out that ‘departmental sessions seem to work better because they (teachers) feel more able to link the ideas more directly to their teaching’. V also agreed with this view, because they gave teachers ‘the opportunity to work together and share ideas and experience’; she cited as an example her department’s working sessions on the development of materials for less able students. However, that department based PD could be problematic was explained by U:

At department level sometimes people ‘slip behind’: they do their own stuff while the planned PD activities are supposed to be taking place. In any case a good deal of what we discuss in the departmental PD sessions are also taken up in the weekly departmental meetings, so there is a certain amount of overlap there. During these sessions we sometimes assist teachers in planning their work; we discuss strategies and resources.

Two non SIT members felt that whole school sessions sometimes worked well, ‘depending on the speakers or facilitators’ (X) and ‘on how well co-ordinated’ they are (Y). Whatever the type of activities, all respondents were of the view that teachers preferred PD activities that were participative, and that provided ideas they

could link to their classroom practice. However, they all expressed reservations about teachers' acceptance of the scheduled PD activities. They felt PD was generally resented by teachers, who 'accept only because they know they have to' (U). They 'don't look forward to it' (E), they 'are resigned to it' (B) and 'it is still resented' (X).

A and Z were the only persons to show some optimism, suggesting that 'many teachers feel they gain something,' (A) and that 'now most people realise it does help' (Z), but A also added that 'the most important thing is that PD should have an effect on classroom practice'.

Various observations were made about possible alternatives to the timing and organisation of PD activities. Members of the SMT along with F, V and X suggested that they could be organised on designated days, possibly once a month or during the school holidays. D and U admitted to not having considered alternatives, since they took PD as given, whereas F and Z ventured into different approaches altogether. F suggested that PD activities could be organised depending on the objectives to be attained by different groups within the school. She gave the example of additional work she was doing with a year one group of students, where she spent non-teaching time 'exploring ways of improving the capacities of these students to learn' (F). Z was more speculative, pointing out that 'each school and its environment are different, and so each school should be able to plan its own PD activities in the way that suits it best'. All respondents said they felt in a position to propose alternatives for PD, but B, Y and Z believed that either nothing would

change (B), or there would be no follow up (Y) or they would be told it was ‘ministry policy’ (Z).

The impact of PD on people’s thinking and practice

Nine out of the twelve participants maintained that PD had some impact on the school, and in a few instances on the classroom as well. According to A ‘there are better lesson plans where a variety of teaching strategies do feature’ and V noted that teachers were giving ‘greater consideration to different ability groups in the classroom’. A, B, C and W mentioned the workshops on living values, which they felt had improved ‘the relationship between teachers and students’ (A), and had encouraged students to be more respectful (W). Application of the behaviour management and homework policies was cited by D, E, F and V as having ‘shown good results’ (D), bringing about changes in students’ behaviour and attitudes (V and F), and at classroom level E thought there was a more pleasant atmosphere:

In the good and average level classrooms you notice a certain degree of tidiness, there’s students’ work on the walls, charts related to the living values targets we worked on in the last plan, for stars and house points.

F explained her reason for the students’ change of attitudes:

Since students knew that checks were being made they did make the effort, and their work was clear and well presented. But this is not happening this year; they are going back to the old habits.

‘Slipping back into the old habits’ (D and F) seemed to have plagued the school throughout the past two planning cycles. C, D, E and F, as well as V, Y and Z, all qualified the gains they felt had been made at the start of each initiative with observations that none of them were sustained. Referring to the behaviour and homework policies, C remarked that ‘they didn’t all last that long’ while D acknowledged that ‘after a while we slipped back and the whole thing lapsed’. The

reasons for this were hinted at by a few people. V mentioned the difficulties of monitoring, and Y saw the problem more as one of a lack of follow-up on the ideas that came out of the PD sessions afterwards: ‘the next Wednesday we move on to something else and the ideas of the previous sessions get left behind’. E noted the ‘frequent changes of PDFs’ and D alluded to ‘a lack of support from the parental community’.

Respondents expressed a range of views on the extent to which PD had changed their thinking and practice. E, F, V and Z were certain that they had learnt new things and they had ‘tried out ideas gained through PD sessions’ (Z) in their classrooms. F mentioned the special classes she was teaching with the year one group, and V the new materials she was using with the lower ability groups she enjoyed teaching. Two teachers noted that they had ‘enjoyed many of the sessions’ (X) and ‘had learnt from others as well’ (Y) but the problem was ‘to put the ideas into practice’. X perceives certain difficulties: ‘There is so little time to go and do the necessary research, write things up, reflect long enough to see how to apply these ideas. Time is so short, and after a while you get tired too’.

Two respondents felt that PD activities had no impact on their practice at all. U thought some of the PD sessions were good, ‘but what we do in them does not affect what happens in my classroom very much.’ Referring to the living values activities, X stated: ‘we talked a lot about them, but they were not really practiced’.

This seems to match the SMT’s views that perhaps teachers had become more reflective through PD, but ‘for the majority, we fall short on the application of the ideas received,’ in the words of A. Nonetheless, except for W, the other eleven

respondents believed that PD was important, that it should be retained, but perhaps not in its present form. The reasons they gave echoed those of F and V who thought that ‘they (PD activities) have been useful for most people’ (F) and ‘teachers tend to forget the good practices too easily ... and need reminding of how teaching can be improved’ (V).

Evidence from observation of SIT meetings

The format and types of Professional Development activities

In the first meeting the PDF noted that the PD evaluation reports for the past two terms would also have to be considered in the evaluation of the development plan they were engaged in. No reference to the format or type of PD activities was made in the second meeting.

Perceptions of PD and its impact on people’s thinking and practice

In her report on one of the targets being evaluated in the second meeting, the headteacher gave as an example of team work among staff, reflections on the performance of different departments, which came up through PD activities during the year. She saw this as an expression of staff’s concern about improving performance, explaining that members of certain departments had proposed ideas for change to others. There was no other reference made, directly or indirectly, to PD in either of the meetings.

Perceptions of Leadership

This section presents perceptions of the actual leadership style in the school. Comments on the possible effects of smallness and personalised working relationships on the SIP are also included where relevant.

Evidence from documentary analysis

The QA evaluation report (Ministry of Education, 2005: 7) outlined the main strengths of leadership in the school thus:

- established good relationships with parents and outside agencies
- established system of networking with other schools, including feeder schools
- regular communication of information established between management and staff
- management made itself accessible to staff, parents and pupils.

The report further noted that ‘the headteacher ...favoured a participative style of leadership’ (ibid: 7):

Hence, management team members were given enough autonomy to carry out their responsibilities and take the necessary initiatives, especially in the absence of the headteacher. All members of Senior Management were clear about their roles. (ibid)

The school’s audit report of the 2006 development plan points to a few areas of concern with regard to management and leadership. The main ones are a need ‘to encourage more professional sharing’; a need ‘to build a more positive ethos of the school’ and to bring about improvements in monitoring by HoDs. There is no indication, however, as to who were involved in the auditing process.

Findings from interviews

Except for V who found the present leadership ‘rather dictatorial’, seven of the nine non SMT members considered the SMT as being ‘rather too lenient’ (W) and lacking in firmness. Some remarked on the consequences of this situation:

The leadership shows flexibility; but this is taken advantage of by people as well. There is a good deal of abuse of the head’s open-mindedness and flexibility. (D)

Permissiveness leaves us free, in a way, to do what we think best, but it can also become laissez-faire and then people take advantage of the situation. (F)

At the moment it’s too soft. The management are not acting what they say, their actions are different from their words. (Z)

D, E, F and V, X and Z also pointed to problems of communication and consultation with staff. F and X referred to problems of ‘interpersonal communication’ among members of the SMT, whereas V found the approach to staff as ‘not very frank; comments about very specific issues or problems that concern specific persons are made generally, never directly to the persons concerned’. E and Z saw the communication of information to staff and others in the school as being sometimes poor: ‘Often information is passed on too late; and then one is put upon to do things but there isn’t much support’ (Z).

On the issue of consultation D and V expressed strong views:

Consultation is lacking at all levels. Decisions are often made with no consultation at staff level. Senior management is struggling to keep things going; they seem unable to get people to work together, they can’t get their commitment; they are unpopular with staff and this is frustrating. (D)

(There is) little or no consultation over most things. Decisions are taken at senior management level and then we’re simply asked whether it’s OK or we’re just told. (V)

U was the only respondent who found the leadership to be ‘consultative, open to discussion and suggestions ... (demonstrating) a clear vision, good communication and fairness’.

The SMT felt that their style of leadership was collaborative and participative, with much emphasis on consultation and openness, as A explained: ‘Even in circumstances where a decision has to be from the top-down perspective, I would still seek people’s views and get them involved’. Meanwhile C observed that they have had ‘to change, to showing more firmness, while remaining friendly’ because people were taking advantage of this more open style of leadership. They felt that staff and students appreciated the type of leadership in the school, which also allowed staff extensive opportunities ‘to suggest innovations’ (A) and to take the lead in various aspects of school life (A, B and C). All non SMT members agreed that they had many opportunities to propose new ideas and changes, and to take the lead in school activities, as denoted by the following comments: ‘yes, the opportunities are there’ (F, W and Y); ‘management is approachable and we can make suggestions’ (F) ‘and we’re encouraged to’ (E). E and Z had some reservations, however, pointing to the need for good planning (E) and adequate support (Z). C was of the view that ‘often teachers tend(ed) to lack initiative’.

The SMT also commented on the possible effects of the small size of the community. While one member thought that size was of no consequence, the other two believed that there were some positive and negative influences. ‘Being small makes it easy to make and maintain contact with parents’ (A); it is easy to get hold of people, but the centralised system of education made for complicated

bureaucracy that could slow down everything. They gave the example of planned field trips, which required Ministry permission and could take weeks, discouraging teachers in the process. A also referred to

The well-known tendency for teachers and parents to go right to the top to settle grievances, whenever they are not happy about something that happened in the school. Rather than seek redress through the proper channel they go straight to the PS or the minister and they tell their version of things. So much time is sometimes taken to get to the bottom of something that could have been settled at a lower level.

Finally they mentioned the issue of too much being known about people in small communities, citing the case of teachers who may have grown up in the same areas as some of the students, and for various reasons may not command the respect of their parents.

Evidence from observation of SIT meetings

No reference was made to any aspect of leadership in either of the meetings observed, but the proceedings of the meetings implied certain power dynamics which gave some indication of the school's leadership style. Both meetings were held in the headteacher's office, and were chaired by the PDF, who guided the team in the compilation of the end of year evaluation report for the development plan. The atmosphere, on both occasions, was rather informal. (The researcher, for instance, was not introduced, as it was assumed that she was known to all present; neither was the purpose of her attendance explained – which she did herself.)

Most members (seven out of nine) were present at the first meeting, including the head and one deputy. It seemed acceptable for members of the SMT to deal with other issues and walk in and out during the meetings. This happened in both meetings. The PDF seemed well prepared, giving out copies of the schedule for the

evaluation report writing and explained the process. He suggested allocating different parts of the report to different members; this was discussed mainly between the head, the deputy and the PDF. The latter sought clarifications from the head as to the content of her part of the report, wanting her to be more specific. The deputy seemed to favour rushing through this exercise to get it done, but the PDF insisted on the importance of having evidence to back up all claims being made. He closed off the meeting by going over the tasks to be done and getting everyone's agreement.

Only five members attended the second meeting, and the head was the only member of the SMT present. During the headteacher's presentation of her report the PDF again asked for several clarifications, and at the end questioned her assumption that there had been improvements in the participation of parents in school meetings. Finally he asked for the team's approval of the head's report and gave instructions for the next meeting, when the DHC was to present her report. That was the only occasion when one other member of the team spoke, confirming a point.

Summary

The school's vision seemed to be stated in terms so varied and diffuse it was difficult to form a clear perception of the kind of school being aspired to. Staff did not appear to have a shared view of what this vision might be and apart from two members of the SMT, no-one else felt that it inspired or influenced their daily work.

Although development planning was considered as an important tool for keeping the school focused on bringing about change, it had not become an integral part of

school life and it was not seen as being particularly effective. Some achievements were noted but the general apathy towards making it work, especially on the part of middle managers, and staff's resigned attitudes about students' lack of interest in learning, seemed to be considered as insurmountable obstacles to improvement.

Attitudes towards professional development remained ambivalent, with staff claiming it was beneficial and necessary, while at the same time considering it as a burdensome requirement of the Ministry. It was also generally agreed that there was very little transfer from PD sessions to classroom practice, although the interview participants claimed they had an impact on their teaching.

Perceptions of leadership differed quite widely between the SMT and the rest of the staff. While the SMT members perceived themselves as being collaborative and participative, several members of staff thought there was a general lack of firmness, serious communication problems and limited consultation. Apart from the PDF, the role of middle level leaders was not fully considered.

The next chapter brings together the findings from the four case study schools, together with data from the interviews of the Ministry based SIP leaders, and presents an analysis of those findings.

Chapter Nine: Analysis

Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of the findings of the four case studies, and the interviews with the Ministry based SIP leaders. The analysis is organised on the basis of the four main areas investigated through the research, namely perceptions of the schools' visions, development planning, school-based professional development and school leadership. These aspects are discussed with reference to the literature presented in Chapter Two, and they are analysed in terms of the issues investigated through the research questions, as given below:

- Schools' stated visions and their impact
- Main characteristics of schools' development planning
- Development planning as a means of bringing about school improvement
- Characteristics of school based professional development
- Links between professional development activities and school improvement
- Characteristics of school leadership
- The practice of participative leadership and its impact on schools
- Enhancing capacities for school improvement in the context of SIDS.

The schools' visions

Vision development and awareness

Sharing a common vision and having a shared set of aims are crucial elements in the process of successful school improvement (Hopkins and MacGilChrist 1998, MacGilchrist 2000, and Hopkins and Harris, 2002). Hopkins et al, (1997) maintain that a clear and shared vision is one of the conditions for ensuring the school's capacity for development. It encompasses the values and expectations of the school and sets clear directions for the school community. Bush and Middlewood (2005) suggest that commitment to the vision is more likely if people have been fully involved in its development.

Fullan (1993) sees this involvement as a long term process which develops at a personal as well as at an organisational level as schools embrace changes for improvement. Like Ouston (1999), he believes schools operate in the 'reality of dynamic complexity' and not as rational organisations. The underlying assumptions of the Seychelles SIP, however, tend strongly towards the latter belief (SIP Secretariat, 2000); Ministry of Education/ HSRC, 2002), as does the original model it adopted – that schools are rational organisations and therefore rational planning tools such as development planning should work (Ouston, *ibid*). These assumptions are not questioned by any of the respondents involved in this study nor within the documentary evidence.

In all four schools the vision statements were produced or revised during the development planning exercise, usually at the beginning of each three year planning

cycle. Members of the SIT claimed that all teaching staff participated in the vision development process but there was no clear indication in any of the documents studied as to how this was done.

All staff interviewed were aware of the existence of their schools' vision statements but, except for Sandragon, most interviewees from the other three schools held only general ideas of their schools' vision statements; often these referred to certain aspects of the stated visions only. Interpretation of the vision statement of Albizia was the most diverse, in that respondents' perceptions differed the most; there seemed to be a marked difference in the views of SIT and non SIT members and most of the interpretations barely matched the written statement.

In Sandragon all respondents knew what the school was aspiring to. They were all able to link the targets set to the vision statement, especially the target aiming to institutionalise mixed ability teaching. This was the only school that had examined the importance of visioning in their auditing process, and the extent to which the school shared a common vision.

The Ministry based SIP leaders were of the view that schools' vision statements were visible around the school. This was not borne out in any of the four schools studied; they all had written vision statements at the start of their development plans (as stipulated by the development planning guidelines) but only Capucin and Sandragon had their statements displayed on the notice boards of the headteachers' offices. Except for Capucin, which was in the process of making its vision known to all staff and students through departmental meetings, the other schools assumed that

students were aware of the visions because they were mentioned occasionally in assemblies.

The four vision statements aimed to develop the full potential of all the students in the schools by creating conducive environments for learning. In wording they all sounded similar to Ministry of Education goal statements. Although rather broad, Kolibri, Capucin and Sandragon had developed clear and fairly succinct statements. In comparison, Albizia's statement was a mix of values and expressions of intent, giving a very broad view of the school's aspirations. Kolibri and Sandragon also included a clear set of values in their development plans.

The impact of schools' visions

Begley (1994) considered the impact of schools' visions in relation to leaders' capacities to develop visions and the degree of involvement of people in the schools. His four-level analysis ranging from 'basic', 'intermediate', 'advanced' to 'expert' suggests that in this instance the visions were at the basic level, largely related to sets of goals derived from Ministry expectations. The two studies of the Seychelles SIP (Ministry of Education, 2000a and Ministry of Education/ HSRC, 2002) confirmed respondents' stated allegiance to their schools' visions, although certain contradictions also emerged.

In the present study staff at the four schools said that their stated visions influenced the way people in the schools worked, to various degrees, but they all agreed that this did not occur on a day-to-day basis. Furthermore, all interviewees were vague

as to how this happened in their schools; their assertions seemed to be expressions of general expectations rather than what actually happened.

The graph below (figure 9.1) compares the responses of SMT, SIT and non SIT members on this issue, for each school. Each response was grouped according to the respondent's level of responsibility in the school and weighted to a scale of 0 to 4, where

4 = Strong influence

3 = Strong only when planning was being done

2 = Influenced generally but not on a daily basis

1 = Very little influence/ not known, and

0 = No real need for a vision.

The sum for each group was calculated, but because groups were of different sizes the results were converted to percentages, where 100% represents the highest response for each respondent in each group.

Figure 9.1 shows the extent to which respondents from the different groups (SMT, SIT and non SIT members) in the four schools felt the vision influenced the way they and other people in their schools worked:

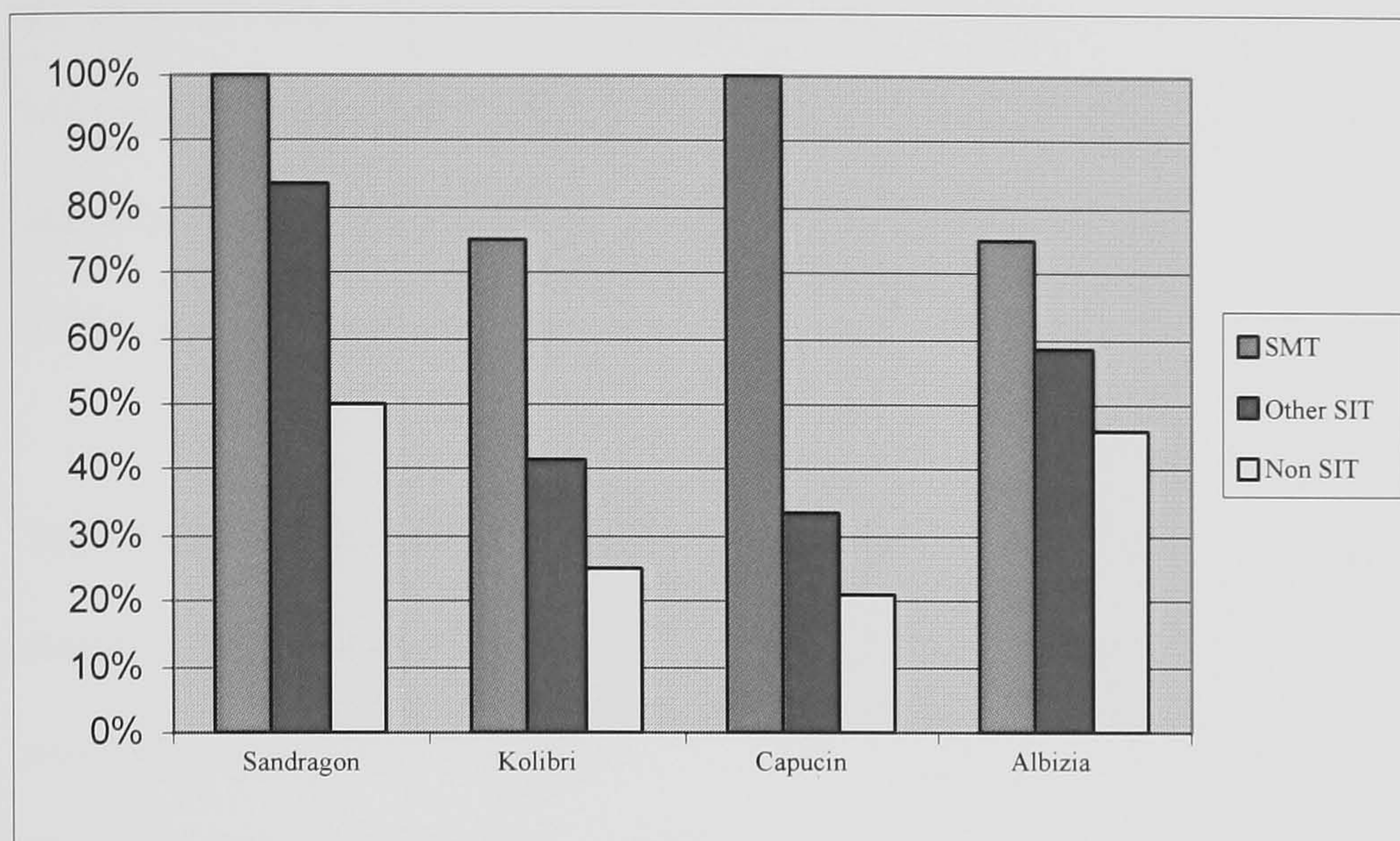


Figure 9.1: *perceived influence of schools' visions on management and staff*

Members of the SMT seemed more convinced that the schools' visions significantly influenced the way they and others worked. The SMTs of Sandragon and Capucin schools were the most emphatic in this regard, even though their statements of conviction remained unsubstantiated. Other SIT members in the four schools, probably through their greater involvement in the development planning process, seemed more aware of the schools' visions and generally professed allegiance to them, although those of Capucin and Kolibri seemed less convinced. Generally non-SIT members seemed more guarded in their responses, with some staff in Kolibri and Capucin questioning the need for visions. The majority in this group expressed the view that awareness of the vision should encourage people towards working for a common purpose.

About one quarter of all the respondents felt that the vision had little influence on the way people worked; and just over half of those further stated that the aspirations of the vision statements were universal to education anyway, and therefore they saw

no need for these to be reiterated in a vision statement. This suggests, as did the Ministry of Education / HSRC (2002: 50) SIP evaluation in Seychelles primary schools, that there is still ‘weak common theorising among the SIP structures’ within and outside of schools.

The Ministry based SIP leaders were inclined to agree with the majority of the schools’ respondents, that the vision had a positive influence on staff’s work, especially in terms of improving team work and greater consultation among staff. However, they felt that once the planning process was done the vision was not referred to again, suggesting, as did Bush and Middlewood (2005), that there was limited commitment to it. As one of them observed: ‘the visions are not lived’. Members of this group also noted that sometimes there was a lack of consistency and coherence between the targets set and the stated vision.

According to MacGilchrist (2000), one important characteristic of effective development planning is the choice of targets for improvement that clearly relate to the school’s vision. This should also be an indication of the extent to which the school’s vision influences its intended actions for improvement. Except for Sandragon, the other three schools tended to have broadly stated targets, which linked only generally to the equally broadly stated visions. One of the Ministry based SIP leaders contended that the difficulty to maintain consistency between clearly articulated visions and plans and targets arose from the quality of school leadership and the impact of the Ministry on schools. Schools were constantly trying to anticipate the Ministry’s expectations, with the result that they were unable to articulate and work towards their own visions.

Development Planning

The process of Development Planning

The process being one prescribed by the Ministry of Education, the steps followed were the same for all four schools. They closely matched the processes described by Hopkins and MacGilchrist (1998):– an internal audit; identifying areas of priority and translating them into targets; the development of an action plan for each target; mechanisms to monitor the implementation of action plans; regular review and evaluation of the impact of the plans. MacGilchrist (2000) noted however, that the process does not necessarily provide a recipe for improvement. Certain conditions have to prevail, and the author identifies a number of characteristics of development plans that have been shown to have an impact on classroom practice (see page 46) . The most relevant ones for this section of the analysis are ‘a shared sense of ownership and purpose’ and ‘a focus on teaching and learning and pupil achievement’ (MacGilchrist, *ibid*: 332). Hopkins and Harris (2000: 10) in their definition of schools’ ‘development capacity’ also identify commitment to collaborative activities and the active involvement of students, staff and the community in policies and decision making, as key conditions for improvement. The promotion of a collaborative culture is one of the major concepts of the Seychelles SIP (SPI Secretariat, 2000) and the recommended development planning process is the main tool for bringing this about. The extent to which such characteristics and concepts have pervaded the developmental practices of the sampled schools in this study are gleaned through the discussions below.

Characteristics of development planning

The tables below summarise the positions of each sampled school with regard to the practices involved in and the characteristics of the development planning process. They are organized on the basis of the steps followed in the schools' development planning process.

The auditing process

	Capucin	Kolibri	Sandragon	Albizia
Auditing - Consultation				
<i>Development Plan 1</i>	Consulted staff and students	Consulted staff and students	Consulted staff, students and parents	Consulted staff and students
<i>Development Plans 2 and 3</i>	Consulted teaching staff only for plan 2, and teaching staff and students (it was reported) for plan 3.	Consulted teaching staff only	Consulted teaching staff only	Consulted teaching staff only. Carried out classroom based research for Plan 3's audit but results were not incorporated in audit report.
Auditing - Determining priority areas	For all three plans, no clear indication of how priority areas were determined. Staff reported it was done by the SIT and they gave final endorsement.	For all three plans, no clear indication of how priority areas were determined. Staff reported it was done by the SIT.	The audit reports of plans 1 and 3 were vague as to how the priority areas were determined. Head explained it was done in consultation with teaching staff; they confirmed this for plans 1 & 2.	For all three plans, the audit reports did not explain how the priority areas were determined. Staff reported it was done by the SIT for plan 2, but most were not sure about plan 3.

Table 9.1: school auditing – consultation and the selection of priorities for action

Extent of consultation

In line with the SIP aims of promoting a collaborative culture (SIP Secretariat, 2000; Hopkins and Harris, 2000) schools were initially strongly encouraged to consult widely, at least during their auditing stage, and to involve as many stakeholders as possible in the selection of areas for action. Thus in the first planning cycle, all staff, representatives of students - and parents in Sandragon school - were involved, and views were sought mainly through questionnaires and interviews. By the second planning cycle three years on, however, they all narrowed down to teaching staff only, and consultation was through focus group meetings at departmental level and whole-school staff meetings. The limitations of this were noted by three of the heads (of Capucin, Sandragon and Albizia) and for their third development plan they claimed that students had been consulted as well but evidence of such consultation was not apparent in the audit reports. Albizia included as an annex to their third development plan a report of a small action research project they carried out among students as part of their auditing process, but the outcomes were not reflected in the targets set.

Prioritising areas for action

The process for prioritising areas for action is a significant one in schools' development planning; if there is to be collaborative planning and decision making (Hopkins and Harris, 2000) and a shared sense of purpose (MacGilchrist, *ibid*: 332), it would be expected that all stakeholders, or at the very least those involved in the auditing, should have some input in the prioritisation process. Only one of the schools – Sandragon – appeared to have involved staff at different stages in the exercise. Capucin sought the teaching staff's approval at the end of the process,

through a whole school meeting, while in the other two schools the procedures remained unclear. In all four schools the issue of prioritisation was further obscured by the summative manner in which the audit reports were presented, making it difficult to gauge the involvement of people and the depth of the information contained therein.

Implementation of development plans

The implementation and monitoring of the plans constitute the next important stages of effective development planning (Hopkins and MacGilchrist, 1998). Table 9.2 below outlines the processes followed in the four case study schools, the time factor and the persons and teams involved in the monitoring.

	Capucin	Kolibri	Sandragon	Albizia
Implementation	Action plans were developed & implemented at whole school and department levels; the process took one term.	Action plans were developed & implemented at departmental level. For plan 1 this took over one year; for plans 2 and 3 about two terms.	Action plans were developed & implemented at whole school and department levels; the process took one term.	For plans 1 and 3, action plans were developed & implemented at whole school and departmental levels within a term. No action plans were done for plan 2.
and monitoring	<p>The responsibility of the SMT, SIT and HODs</p> <p>SIT chaired by headteacher.</p>	<p>The responsibility of the SMT, SIT and HODs.</p> <p>SIT chaired by headteacher.</p>	<p>The responsibility of the SMT, SIT and HODs.</p> <p>SIT chaired by DHC.</p>	<p>The responsibility of the SMT, SIT and HODs.</p> <p>SIT chaired by PDF.</p>

Table 9.2 : Implementation and monitoring

In the IQEA project, Harris and Hopkins (2000) noted the importance of multi-level interventions for sustained school improvement, and by this they meant

interventions at classroom, department and school levels. The Seychelles SIP also attempted to institutionalise this concept, with schools being required to set targets at those different levels and aiming primarily to improve students' achievements. Action plans related to the identified priorities were thus developed at departmental as well as at whole school levels. However, except for Sandragon, the connections between the whole school and department level actions plans were not always apparent and the implementation process seemed more focused on the departmental plans rather than on the whole school ones.

Focus on teaching and learning

Another characteristic of effective development planning is the focus on teaching and learning and students' achievements (Hopkins and MacGilchrist, 1998; MacGilchrist, 2000). The authors maintain that successful schools have learnt to devise targets which are 'tightly defined' and 'make clear the criteria for success' (ibid: 418). In the four schools, although the departmental action plans stated their broad aims in terms of the improvement of students' achievements, only about half of their targets were actually focused on teaching and learning. The remaining targets were directed at student behaviour management and discipline; Capucin, Kolibri and Albizia developed homework policies, and Kolibri aimed to improve student behaviour and achievements through a strong House system. The limited focus on teaching and learning may also be partly the result of their auditing practices which did not involve other stakeholders and were only superficially critical of aspects of teaching and learning.

Similarly, in all four schools correspondence between the areas of priority, the targets and the tasks chosen were often unclear (Sandragon to a lesser degree), with targets and tasks having such a narrow focus they were unlikely to achieve the desired results. In the plans of Capucin, Kolibri and Albizia these results were stated in terms of success criteria which were often not ‘sufficiently rigorous to enable their impact to be assessed’ (Hopkins and MacGilchrist, *ibid*: 419). As a consequence the schools found that, although according to their professional judgements the success criteria were met, it was hard to provide the necessary evidence and they conceded that very often the anticipated change did not seem to happen as expected.

Monitoring and evaluation processes and mechanisms

Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the plan are crucial factors in successful development planning (Hopkins and MacGilchrist, 1998; Ministry of Education/ HSRC, 2002). The implementation must therefore be effectively led and managed if the targets are to be achieved. The four schools had established the same type of structures (which are proposed by the Ministry), for monitoring their action plans, with the SIT holding the main responsibility for this. The SIT is meant to operate as the ‘the engine of school improvement’, as Beresford et al (2003) explained with reference to the IQEA. The roles of each group (SMT, SIT and HoDs), however, and the extent of their involvement in the development planning activities differed from one school to another.

At the level of the SMT, the heads in the four schools seemed to take a more active role than their deputies. At the eight SIT meetings observed, the heads were always

present, and they chaired the meetings in two of the schools (Capucin and Kolibri). The deputies on the other hand seemed less present: at Kolibri the deputies attended only one of the two meetings, and that was a special one when SI co-ordinators were present. At Albizia the deputy head for pastoral care was not present at either meeting and the deputy for curriculum attended one only. The four SMTs confirmed that they met frequently and informally to discuss issues of immediate relevance, possibly including school improvement issues, but no minutes of SMT meetings were available. They all agreed, however, that school improvement issues were discussed primarily in the SIT meetings which they normally attended.

The involvement of SITs also varied from one school to another. Members from Capucin and Sandragon seemed more aware of and involved in the implementation process. The teams had a meeting schedule drawn up for the term, met regularly (usually weekly) and checked on progress. Kolibri and Albizia mentioned a designated weekly meeting time, which often did not seem to be respected. It was not clear in those two schools how the implementation of the actions plans were actually being monitored.

Sandragon's SIT monitoring procedures appeared to lack focus at times, probably as a result of combining the roles of the SIT and the curriculum co-ordinating committee (normally comprising all HoDs and the DHC). The documentary analysis, along with observation of SIT meetings, suggest that the majority of issues discussed were peripheral to the targets set in the development plans. The PDF joined the meeting only to discuss the weekly professional development sessions, and to carry out the evaluation of the action plans. Judging from the PDF's reports

and the interview findings, discussion of the monitoring of action plans seemed to take place more regularly during the PD sessions.

The roles of HoDs and their links with the SIT was less clear and differed between schools. At Capucin and Sandragon, HoDs made up the rest of the SIT (other than the SMT and PDF), where they represented their departments and possibly one other department. The rationale was that they were directly responsible for the implementation of the departmental action plans, although one SIT member from Capucin argued that this caused a certain degree of duplication between the work of the SIT and the curriculum co-ordinating committee (borne out by the Sandragon example).

Kolibri and Albizia, on the other hand, had opted for a mix of HoD and/ or teacher representatives from the different departments, on the basis of encouraging teachers to take leadership roles. However, considering the irregularity of their SIT meetings, and the limited role the SITs appeared to play in the implementation of the action plans, it was difficult to gauge the effectiveness of this arrangement. The heads claimed that links between the HoDs and the SIT were maintained through the participation of the DHC in both groups, but again in both schools these groups had met only occasionally (once or twice a term) and the DHCs were not often present at the SIT meetings. In the circumstances, it is difficult to perceive how the SITs of the two schools could be the driving force for school improvement. In fact in all four schools the PDFs were the ones who tried to take on this role, somewhat by default.

Maintaining momentum in implementation

Maintaining momentum in the implementation of the development plan is another important aspect of the process cited by Hopkins and MacGilchrist (1998). In this study, from the auditing process to the implementation stage of the action plans, three schools took one term (three months) and Kolibri took two terms (six months). While it was acknowledged by the SI co-ordinators that Kolibri was particularly slow in getting to the implementation stage, one term seemed to be acceptable to all concerned. This researcher, however, noticed the consequent loss of momentum in the whole process. In effect schools' three year plans were implemented over two years and three months, with one term at least being taken at either end of the period, for putting the plan together and for evaluating it. According to the schools' own evaluations, most of the action plans were never fully implemented and they all cited a lack of time as one of the major reasons.

Evaluation and reporting

Almost all school improvement literature dealing with the processes involved, stress the critical importance of carefully evaluating the impact of the planned changes (eg. Hopkins et al, 1997; Hopkins and MacGilchrist, 1998; MacGilchrist, 2000; Harris and Jackson, 2003). The SIP also acknowledges the key role of evaluation in the implementation of development plans (SIP Secretariat, 2000), and clear procedures for evaluation and reporting have been established in all schools. The PDFs have been trained and are regularly briefed by Ministry personnel on the specifications and requirements of the various reports to be produced. Table 9.3 provides a brief overview of the teams and persons involved and the types of reports expected by the Ministry.

	Capucin	Kolibri	Sandragon	Albizia
Evaluation	Led by SIT and PDF assigned main responsibility. Two QA evaluations done so far.	Led by SIT and Head and PDF assumed main responsibility. Two QA evaluations done so far.	Led by SIT and PDF assigned main responsibility. Two QA evaluations done so far.	Led by SIT and PDF assigned main responsibility. One QA evaluation done so far.
and reporting	Produced annual progress reports, and a final evaluation report at the end of each planning cycle. For plan 3: termly progress reports as well.	Produced annual progress reports, and a final evaluation report at the end of each planning cycle. None for plan 1. For plan 3: termly progress reports as well.	Produced annual progress reports, and a final evaluation report at the end of each planning cycle. For plan 3: termly progress reports as well.	Produced annual progress reports, and a final evaluation report at the end of each planning cycle. For plan 3: termly progress reports as well.

Table 9.3: Evaluation and reporting

As the PDFs are the main link persons with Ministry personnel in this process, it is perhaps understandable that schools assign the responsibility for evaluation and reporting to PDFs. In the four schools, while the SIT collaborated in the assessment of the action plans to some degree (by providing evidence or professional judgements), the PDFs had sole responsibility for compiling all the necessary information and producing the evaluation reports.

The overwhelming impression, from the interviews and analysis of the evaluation reports, was that the SIT was primarily fulfilling a requirement of the Ministry rather than making a genuine assessment of the achievements of their action plans, in spite of the commitments of the PDFs and their attempts to make the process evidence-based. Except for Sandragon, which provided some clear evidence of achievements in its evaluation report for the second development plan (2003), the

evaluation reports of the other three schools tended to be based on professional judgements rather than on evidence. This was often due to difficulties in measuring the achievement of the targets, partly due to a lack of precision in the target statements, but also because there had been no systematic data collection along the way to serve as supporting evidence (according to some SIT members from the three schools). Thus even with a clear process of evaluation in place the effects seemed to be mitigated by the unsystematic nature of monitoring and the limited extent to which the results of evaluations were used.

Maintenance of achievements

The Ministry’s school improvement guidelines require that development plans include targets that have been achieved and need to be maintained. Maintaining past achievements is another essential aspect of sustained school improvement (Hopkins and Largerweij, 1996; MacGilchrist, 2000). Maintenance plans for each of these targets are expected to be developed and included in the development plans (see Table 9.4).

	Capucin	Kolibri	Sandragon	Albizia
Maintenance of achievements	<p>Maintenance plans included in plan 1 along with action plans; none for plan 2.</p> <p>Two priorities for maintenance are noted in plan 3, and action plan included for one of them.</p>	<p>Maintenance targets were mentioned in plan 3 only, but action plans for implementation were not included.</p>	<p>Maintenance targets were mentioned in plan 3 only and action plans for implementation were included.</p>	<p>Plans 1 and 2 maintained the same targets, as they had not been achieved. Plan 3 had no maintenance plans.</p>

9.4 *Maintenance of achievements*

Table 9.4 suggests that schools' interpretations of the guidelines vary and the plans are not always included or developed. In view of the difficulties schools encounter with monitoring the implementation of action plans (discussed above) it may be problematic to determine the best way of maintaining the achievements of previous plans. Perhaps as a consequence, three schools appear to have put a rather different interpretation on what constituted maintenance targets: Capucin, Kolibri and Albizia referred to them as targets that had not been fully achieved and were carried over to the next plans, whereas the Ministry's guidelines expected schools to maintain the achievements of previous successfully implemented plans.

Development Planning and School Improvement

This section considers the extent to which development planning is perceived as an effective tool for bringing about improvements in secondary schools. The perceptions of the management and staff of the sampled schools are discussed and contrasted with the views of the Ministry based SIP leaders, in terms of the process of development planning, implementation and evaluation of development plans, and changes and improvements attributed to development planning. These perceptions are also discussed with reference to relevant aspects of the literature.

The process of development planning

It was assumed by the schools and Ministry based SIP leaders alike that the development planning model adopted from the British school improvement approaches (SIP Secretariat, 2000b; Dimmock and Walker 2000; Ouston, 1999) was appropriate in the circumstances of Seychelles (see page 94). In all four schools, the process of development planning was seen as a valuable exercise

which, in the words of the Sandragon head, ‘provided a focus for action in the school’. The importance of self evaluation was mentioned or implied by the management and staff of the four schools. At least half of the interviewees (SIT and non SIT members alike) maintained that the auditing process, in particular, allowed them to reflect critically on the functioning of their schools and on their practice, share their experiences and consider opportunities for change. They felt this was a very worthwhile exercise and that the process should be retained.

Harris and Hopkins (2000: 12), in their overview of the IQEA, proposed that successful schools ‘recognise that *enquiry and reflection* are important processes in school improvement’. One of the guiding principles of the IQEA project is the involvement of all members of the school community, including students and parents, in school improvement. Hopkins and MacGilchrist (1998) in their discussion of successful development planning also point to the importance of ensuring the participation of all stakeholder groups. McLaughlin (1991: 142) notes the importance of teachers ‘carefully observing and analysing (their) actions and interpreting the consequences’ of what they have done.

While valuing the process of auditing and self evaluation, the four schools in this study have tended to move away from wider consultation, restricting their auditing processes to teaching staff only. Even when students were consulted (Sandragon, Capucin and Albizia), their views did not appear to have been taken into consideration in the planning. The one-sidedness of the exercise was apparent in the past two audit reports of the three schools, which concluded that ultimately the faults for poor performance lay with students who were not interested in learning.

were unmotivated (Capucin and Albizia), and lacking in punctuality (Sandragon). In fact there was very limited self evaluation on the part of teachers (McLaughlin, *ibid*) in any of the four schools' audit and evaluation reports. One of the Ministry based SIP leaders speculated that, in spite of the tendency to blame students, schools' concerns to find solutions to the problems of student underachievement was an indication of teachers' awareness of the possible shortcomings of their teaching strategies, although they would not admit to this openly.

All the Ministry based SIP leaders were also of the view that development planning had given schools a focus and the capacity to set and work towards clearer targets. However, two thirds of this group felt that schools were still to really understand the process and make it their own; for the moment they felt schools were more concerned with responding to the demands of the Ministry. Nonetheless the whole group agreed that the development planning process had brought about a greater involvement of staff in school activities, and consequent changes in attitudes among both staff and school management.

The involvement of staff beyond the auditing process did not seem to be as extensive as suggested by the Ministry based SIP leaders. Almost all the interviewees from the four schools agreed that the process of development planning allowed them to determine the areas of priority for action in their schools. Yet, except for Sandragon, where staff confirmed they were involved in all the steps taken, the other respondents who were non SIT members tended to assume this was done by the SIT. They expressed no wish to be further involved in any case.

Similarly for the monitoring structures and processes which are integral to the implementation of action plans; all non SIT members mentioned the SMT, the SIT and HoDs without venturing to elaborate on the mechanisms that might operate between them. It gave the impression that they were stating what was expected, in particular what was expected by the Ministry, without feeling much involvement. While SIT members from the four schools provided more detailed explanations of the implementation and monitoring of the plans, they also described what was expected, in accordance with Ministry guidelines. The SIT members seemed satisfied with the monitoring structures in place and considered the roles of the different teams and individuals involved to be clear.

Implementation and evaluation of development plans

The models for successful school improvement discussed in Chapter Two, and the one adopted by the SIP, imply the involvement of all stakeholders, commitment to a shared vision, a focus on enquiry and reflection and effective co-ordination and monitoring of development priorities (Hopkins and Harris, 2000; Hopkins and MacGilchrist, 1998; MacGilchrist, 2000). In the present study it is clear that such ‘conditions for school improvement’ (Hopkins and Harris, 2000: 11) are not yet embedded in any of the schools. It is not surprising therefore that in all four schools both SIT and non SIT members acknowledged that the most problematic aspect of development planning was monitoring and sustaining the impetus of actions taken. In each school, about two thirds of the interview participants – mostly SIT members - mentioned concerns about actions planned but not executed; actions taken initially but not sustained; actions pursued with encouraging results, that had been allowed to lapse over time. Many different reasons were proffered in each school.

Capucin SIT and non SIT members perceived their problem to be that of failing to sustain achievements. They cited several examples of actions carried through, such as the development of a behaviour policy, using more student centred approaches in maths and languages in the first year classes, which had lapsed for reasons that did not seem clear to them. SIT and non SIT members in Kolibri and Albizia identified similar problems of maintaining the implementation of various actions and policies (eg. on homework and behaviour). The Kolibri SIT members attributed this to a lack of consistency in the way teachers tackled innovations, and poor record keeping which yielded no evidence of achievements, whereas at Albizia it was seen as an issue of commitment at the level of staff as well as the SMT. Frequent changes at management level in the latter school was also noted as a possible drawback. At Sandragon School the problems of implementation were perceived as being the result of several factors: the SMT and teachers experiencing difficulty in managing time; work overload; a lack of commitment on the part of some teachers; staff turnover and staff taking advantage of the SMT's lack of firmness.

The SMT members of the four schools tended to see the problem as one of time constraints: they never had enough time to attend to the agreed monitoring procedures and to sustain a focus on teaching and learning. They noted that many other demands, including unexpected ones from the Ministry, seemed to constantly assail them, interfering with their monitoring schedules. Almost all the examples they gave were of administrative tasks or issues related to student discipline. The SMT of Sandragon and Albizia also mentioned difficulties in getting HoDs to assume greater responsibility for monitoring the department level action plans.

They felt that although the roles were clear, and the procedures for monitoring had been agreed upon, HoDs seemed reluctant to pursue that aspect of their jobs. By contrast, Sandragon highlighted the example of one language HoD who had systematically monitored teaching and learning in her department over a year, with the result that the subject teachers became more focused in examining their practice.

The other HoDs, however, seemed to have different expectations from those of the SMTs. At Sandragon and Albizia, the HoDs declared themselves satisfied with teachers' planning for differentiated teaching and learning for instance, while being aware, through the evaluation of their action plans, that such teaching was generally not happening. The SMTs were also aware of this but seemed not to have addressed the issue, perhaps finding no acceptable means of demanding accountability (Ministry of Education, 2000a; Velayutham and Perera, 2004). For example, the Capucin head glossed over a frank discussion of their monitoring roles between the DHC and a HoD, during a SIT meeting, seeming more concerned with avoiding confrontations at all cost.

In view of the difficulties encountered in the implementation of the plans, the schools' evaluations of their development plans presented further challenges. All non SIT respondents saw this as an exercise carried out by the SIT, somewhat removed from and having little impact on their daily responsibilities. SIT members, apart from the PDFs, seemed to consider the evaluation process primarily as another requirement of the Ministry. In Albizia and Sandragon, however, the yearly evaluations were used in the revisions of some of the targets not yet achieved and in the development of some new targets.

There were divergent views among the Ministry based SIP leaders on issues of implementation and evaluation. The four who were not directly involved with the support programme to schools seemed to hold more favourable impressions than the two members of this group who worked directly with schools. The former group thought that the implementation processes were continually improving in schools, that staff had a better understanding of the planning process and plans were being produced more quickly. The two other members, on the other hand, expressed concern about schools' capacities to successfully implement the plans they developed. One of them, like staff at Albizia School, saw the problems arising from a lack of commitment on the part of individuals who were implicated in the process; the other associated the problems with staff's difficulty in linking their daily classroom practice with the tasks set in the development plan produced earlier on.

Changes and improvements linked to development planning

In spite of the concerns expressed at school as well as at Ministry levels, and the difficulties encountered during the implementation process, almost all respondents believed that development planning had resulted in several positive changes in schools. As in the ISIP (Hopkins, 1990) the schools viewed the outcomes in organisational terms rather than linked to improvements in teaching and learning. A focus on the realities of the school, better communication, collaboration and sharing among staff, especially at departmental levels, were examples of improvements cited by most respondents in the four schools and by Ministry-based SIP leaders. Additionally they felt the way departments and school management worked had also changed. Several school staff and two Ministry based SIP leaders believed that

teachers had become more open about what they do; ‘discussions of a more critical nature take place about teaching and learning’(SIP leader 2). Other Ministry based SIP leaders mentioned the development of school based policies, better record keeping and more extensive monitoring as examples of improvement that had occurred but no-one proposed any evidence to back up these claims.

Relatively few respondents considered the changes and improvements in terms of student achievements (Hopkins and MacGilchrist, 1998; MacGilchrist, 2000). Only two Ministry based SIP leaders and 12 respondents from three schools (one quarter of total) discussed changes in relation to students. One other Ministry based SIP leader and two non SIT members of staff at Kolibri and Sandragon mentioned improvements in the national examination results in recent years, but these claims were not substantiated.

Respondents from Sandragon, Kolibri, and Albizia (where behaviour management policies had been developed), referred to improvements in student behaviour. That this might be what people found desirable, rather than the reality, was alluded to by one Albizia SIT member who, referring to the experience of his school, observed that the development of policies did not imply their successful implementation. Three other Albizia SIT members and two non SIT members believed that the homework policy had worked better for a while, at least at secondary years one and two. Sandragon SIT members also reported greater participation of students in school life, as a result of the activities of the various student committees instituted by the school.

Four respondents from Capucin School (one SIT and three non SIT) concluded that little had changed for students that could be linked to the school improvement programme, but they thought that there ought to be changes in view of the actions taken, and hence they questioned the gathering of evidence. This was a point also raised by two Kolibri staff members (one SIT and one non SIT member), who suggested that the type of evidence, the process and methods used were not serving the purposes of the schools. They wondered whether the way the evaluations were done actually showed the evidence properly. The schools, however, did not appear to have reflected on such issues systematically.

In addition to the issues of evidence-based results, time management (all four schools) and instability at SMT level because of frequent changes of leadership (Albizia), schools perceived certain other constraints that they believed may have affected the achievement of their plans. Kolibri noted shortages of material and financial resources while pointing out the need to get teachers to be more accountable. This last point was also raised by one of the Ministry based SIP leaders who advocated a greater level of accountability throughout the system. She believed that schools would become more accountable when the Ministry, which ultimately approved the plans, established effective mechanisms for support and demanded greater accountability from schools. She noted that there was a need to firmly establish links between the plans, school financing and QA.

Four other Ministry-based SIP leaders commented on various aspects of schools' perceived dependence on Ministry support or absence of an empowerment drive, a situation somewhat akin to that of Malta (Bezzina, 2002a). They gave as examples

three schools that seemed unable to sustain a networking project once the SIP co-ordinator had withdrawn; heads who had received training at masters degree level experiencing difficulty in transforming new learning into effective school-based practice; and SMTs allowing day-to-day demands to overtake the requirements of the development plans.

Professional Development

Characteristics of PD

Teacher learning is considered an essential factor in educational change (Imants, 2003) and concepts of organisational learning and schools as learning communities are at the core of efforts to enhance schools' capacity for development (Louis and Leithwood, 1998; Stoll, 1999; Hopkins and Jackson, 2002). Fullan (1993) points to enquiry and continuous learning among the teaching staff as indispensable conditions for successful schools. With reference to the IQEA, Hopkins and Harris (2000: 11) also considered '*staff development* opportunities for teachers to learn together' as a crucial condition for whole school improvement, while MacGilchrist (2000) identified staff development as a characteristic of successful development planning. The school improvement model adopted by the SIP also acknowledges the centrality of professional development to school growth (SIP Secretariat, 2000; Ministry of Education/ HSRC, 2002).

Leithwood and Louis (1998) specify three levels of organisational learning: teachers and school leaders engaging in individual learning; learning in small groups or teams and learning that occurs throughout the school. In this study the

focus is mainly on teacher learning that takes place in groups or teams and sometimes at whole school level. The aspirations of the Seychelles SIP are to institutionalise staff professional development in schools and hence promote the development of professional learning communities.

In the analysis of PD characteristics and impact in the sampled schools, some of the characteristics of professional learning communities discussed by Imants (2003: 296) are considered in the light of the findings. These are ‘a collective focus on student learning’, ‘reflective dialogue’, ‘deprivatised practice’ and ‘collaboration’ in various aspects of school life.

Table 9.5 summarises the main characteristics of PD activities that have taken place over the past four years, in the sampled schools. Like all other state schools in the system, the schools in this study were allocated one and a half hours in the weekly teaching timetable for mandatory PD activities for all teachers. The activities are meant to link directly with the targets set in the action plans, and thus the PD plan is supposed to be drawn up at the same time as the action plans. The planning, production and co-ordination of the PD plan is the responsibility of the PDF who also reports each term on the implementation of the plan to the Ministry sections concerned.

	Capucin	Kolibri	Sandragon	Albizia
<i>Links between PD and areas of priority (current development plan)</i>	A few sessions were linked.	No clear links could be seen.	For about half the sessions links were clear, and directly made with targets.	No clear links could be seen.
<i>Staff participation in PD planning</i>	Needs are discussed at department level, and then contents of PD plan are determined by the head and SIT.	Staff seemed unclear about process of consultation. They presumed decisions were made by the SIT.	Needs discussed at department level; draft plan put together by PDF and SIT; final approval sought from all staff.	Needs discussed at department level and final plan is compiled by PDF in consultation with SIT.
<i>Format of PD sessions (per term an average of ten)</i>	Over half of the sessions were department-based group meetings; the rest whole school meetings/workshops.	Just over half of the sessions were department-based group meetings; the rest whole school meetings.	65% of sessions were whole school meetings/workshops; the rest department-based or other types of small work groups.	Over the past year. only department-based group sessions.
<i>Content: Focus on teaching and learning (over four years: 2003 -06)</i>	Approx. 21% of PD sessions - directly linked to teaching and learning issues.	Approx. 20% of PD sessions - directly linked to teaching and learning issues.	Approx. 22% of PD sessions - directly linked to teaching and learning issues.	Approx. 22% of PD sessions - directly linked to teaching and learning issues.
<i>Facilitation of PD activities</i>	Mainly by SIT members, a few teachers and outside facilitators.	Mainly by SIT members, HoDs, and a few outside facilitators.	Mainly by SIT members, HoDs, and very few outside facilitators.	Mainly by HoDs, a few SIT members, teachers and outside facilitators.
<i>Delivery / frequency (over the past four years)</i>	An average of ten sessions per term were held.	Over the past two years only about half the sessions planned in a term were held. An average of ten sessions per term were held prior to that.	An average of ten sessions per term were held.	An average of ten sessions per term were held up until 2005; by term 3 of 2005 no sessions happened. Now revived, weekly at department level.

Table 9.5: Characteristics of PD activities in the sampled schools

Deprivatised Practice

The joint planning and agreed action (Huffman and Jacobson 2003), evidenced through the shared development planning processes in the four schools, did not always lead to the identification of staff development needs directly connected to the development plan. While there seemed to be a degree of collaboration in the PD planning process, mainly at departmental level, connections with the schools' selected areas of priority remained limited, and often tenuous. Even in the schools (Capucin and Kolibri) where the final decision on the content of the plan rested with the SIT and the head, these connections were not often apparent. One of the Ministry based SIP leaders also noted the dilemmas schools may have in proposing PD for personal growth as opposed to PD for school growth, which in her view remained unresolved.

Reflective dialogue and collaborative practices

Reflective dialogue and collaborative practices (Imants, 2003) in the planning of PD differed between the schools but in three of the schools they occurred only in limited ways. Sandragon staff seemed satisfied that the PD plans reflected their needs; all interviewees from this school confirmed their involvement in the process and having the final say in what was organised. At Capucin and Albizia, staff were consulted initially, they were aware of a selection process but they did not seem to be involved in making the final decisions. After initial consultation at department level, Kolibri staff seemed uncertain as to how the plan was determined. Except for one SMT member of Kolibri and one teacher from Albizia schools, who expressed concern about PD sessions they felt did not respond to staff needs, all other respondents from the three last-named schools expressed no views on the process.

They simply seemed resigned to participating in PD sessions because it was a requirement of the Ministry. This feeling seemed so pervasive that only nine people (3 from Capucin, 3 from Kolibri, 1 from Sandragon and 2 from Albizia) out of the 48 interviewed considered alternative options outside of the present PD framework. While everyone was not happy about the timing of PD sessions they had not ventured into explorations of alternative modes of organising PD activities outside of the present weekly format, occurring during term time.

Format of PD sessions

There was little variation among the schools as to the format of PD sessions. They took the form of either departmental meetings / subject based working groups led by HoDs or other teachers, or whole school meetings led by SIT or SMT members. Two or three presentations per term by outside facilitators completed the programme, except for Sandragon school, which was restricted in the number of outside facilitators it could invite because of additional transport costs.

It seems likely that the centralised nature of the system has encouraged a ‘one type fits all’ outlook on school based PD, with the result that little innovation had taken place in this area since the inception of the SIP ten years ago. Even the Ministry-based SIP leaders seemed rather cautious in their consideration of alternatives, in spite of being well aware of the teachers’ reservations about PD. On the one hand they speculated on various alternative modes, with two of them advocating broader and more integrated forms of PD that should allow for flexibility and should permeate the whole school; on the other hand, they seemed to stop short at actively

advocating such changes. This is significant because their hierarchical positions gave them the power to make decisions on the issue.

Collective focus on student learning

A 'collective focus on student learning' (Imants, *ibid*) was not always apparent in the planned PD activities. Only about 21% of PD sessions planned over the past four years were directly related to teaching and learning issues in all four schools. The rest were taken up with administrative tasks such as examination preparation and analyses of the results, the development of various school policies, and development planning exercises related to the production of the schools' development plans. The effectiveness of school based PD may have been limited by the content of the PD programmes and the extent to which the PD plans were implemented. However, the general feeling that anything related to the SIP could fit into the PD time slot seemed to have persisted over the years. This was also a conclusion drawn by the evaluators of the Seychelles SIP in primary schools (Ministry of Education/ HSRC, 2002).

Two schools, Kolibri and Albizia, did not always organise the required number of PD sessions. The reasons given were linked to changes at SMT level, no PDF in post at the school and a lack of forward planning. Departmental meetings sometimes took place during the PD allocated time. It is not known whether any form of sanction was applied by the Ministry.

Perceptions of the impact of PD in schools

In spite of staff's reservations about the PD activities, all respondents unanimously agreed that the concept was a good one. that many of the activities they had participated in were worthwhile and three quarters of them felt they had learnt new things through the activities. They further noted that school based PD had made a difference to most teachers; except for three HoDs (from Capucin, Kolibri and Albizia respectively), all other interviewees claimed that what they had learnt in PD had made a difference to their teaching. As Burchell et al (2002) posit, teachers themselves expect that continuing professional development would make a difference in their classrooms. Some gave examples of new classroom techniques they had tried out, of greater awareness of the need to cater for a wider range of abilities in their teaching, of taking a new approach to behaviour problems in class. All respondents agreed that there was greater openness among teachers, more sharing of ideas and experiences. The extent to which PD activities have had an impact on teachers' thinking and practice, however, remains difficult to ascertain, largely because the evaluations are based on self reviews and reports (Glover and Law, 1996). Joyce et al (1989) point to the difficulties in getting teachers to change their teaching practices in spite of extensive training and the support of inspired teachers and outside agencies. While acknowledging Burchell et al's (ibid) argument that self reports can form the basis for identifying the potential for impact, in this instance the issue is further compounded by teachers' ambivalent attitudes towards PD and their individual perceptions of the usefulness of the activities. As Imants (2003:304) observed, without systematic reflection on classroom practice and genuine collaboration, 'the main focus of teacher learning is on refinement of existing routines'. The QA reports of each of the schools confirm the mixed

feelings with which PD was received (to a lesser degree at Sandragon school), and the evaluators found little evidence, in all four schools, for the related claims made about changes in classroom practice.

The Ministry-based SIP leaders also felt that PD had a limited impact on teaching and learning, but they noted positive changes in teachers' attitudes towards collaborative practices and their becoming more self reliant. One member of this group pointed to the impressionistic nature of findings in this area of the SIP, and the need for the impact of PD on teaching and learning to be measured.

Leadership

Characteristics of leadership

The characteristics of leadership that emerged from the sampled schools are discussed here in terms of visioning, leadership in development planning and professional development. These aspects are considered because they form the basis of the strategies for school improvement used in the Seychelles SIP, and in the model it adopted (SIP Secretariat, 2000; Ministry of Education, 2000b; Hopkins and MacGilchrist, 2000).

Providing clear visions based on 'certain fundamental values and beliefs' (Harris et al, 2003: 75), empowering others to lead and to participate in school development and a commitment to the professional development of everyone in the school community are among the qualities and capacities of effective school leaders (Southworth, 2002, Harris et al, *ibid*). Although there is still no clear consensus

about the nature of educational leadership, there is agreement that the type and quality of leadership are powerful elements in the processes of school improvement (Harris et al, 2003; Stoll and Fink, 1996).

Visioning

The role of the SMTs in developing the visions of their schools was not clear: they participated through the SIT but the extent of their involvement and that of other SIT members was also not made clear. This suggests a mix of Begley's (1994) 'basic' and 'intermediate' categories of school leaders as visionaries. The visions tended to echo the aspirations of the Ministry's goals (basic level in Begley's framework), with a statement of values added on by the SIT. The SMTs of the four schools seemed to share the visions of their schools, although different members of the SMTs of Kolibri and Albizia placed emphasis on different aspects of their visions. While the Sandragon SMT believed that the school was guided by the vision and staff's work was influenced by it, the Capucin SMT thought that this did not happen on a day-to-day basis and the concepts needed occasional reinforcement. In the other two schools opinions were divided: two members of each team felt that the vision had a strong influence on staff while the other one did not.

Leading development planning

Like the school improvement groups (SIGs) in the IQEA project (Hopkins and Harris, 2000), the SIT here are meant to provide strategic direction to the school improvement initiatives (Beresford et al, 2003). The composition of each of the SITs and the extent of members' participation may give an indication of the extent

to which the teams took the lead in the SIP. In the Sandragon and Capucin SITs, all departments were represented by HoDs and the teams met regularly; the other two schools tended to have smaller teams with a mix of HoDs and teacher representatives and met only occasionally. Documentary evidence did not make clear the involvement of the various members of the team but observation of SIT meetings at Kolibri and Albizia indicated that the teacher representatives took no part in the discussions.

It was also difficult to ascertain the degree to which leadership was devolved among the SITs (Harris and Young, 2000). In Capucin and Kolibri the SIT was chaired by the headteacher. The deputy head for curriculum led the team at Sandragon whereas in Albizia School it was the PDF. The PDFs in the four schools were in fact the lead persons in producing the action plans and in compiling evaluation reports, but their designated position vis-a-vis the Ministry seems to have the effect of disengaging the SMTs from much of the process of development planning (ie: they had been empowered to do this by the Ministry, not by the school and the SMTs left them to get on with it). The SMTs contributed to the planning and evaluation processes in greater or lesser degrees depending on the targets set, and ultimately the plans and the reports have to be endorsed by the heads.

Leading Professional Development

Building professional learning communities is an important aspect of the role of effective school leaders (Harris and Young, 2000; Huffman and Jacobson, 2003; Frost and Harris, 2003). Teacher collaboration, networking and sharing of good practice are encouraged and actively promoted in schools where the leaders

endeavour to provide opportunities for PD. In this study the ‘one size fits all’ approach to school based PD has tended to mitigate against the evolution of a broader perception of PD. In the four schools the SMTs left the implementation of the PD plans almost entirely to the PDFs, once the plans were approved by the SIT. At Capucin and Sandragon, the SIT meetings took place the day before the planned PD sessions, and in each meeting the PDF was required to confirm the organisation and content of the next PD session. This was also scheduled to happen at Kolibri but the SIT did not often meet. Apart from Capucin, where the PDF noted the participation of SMT members in some PD sessions, no mention of this was made in the other schools.

Perceptions of leadership

As Harris (2002) points out, school improvement literature readily acknowledges that effective leadership approaches in education may be as diverse as there are schools. Harris et al (2003) further note that perceptions of leadership may differ depending on whose views are being represented. It comes as no surprise in this study that there were wide ranging views of school leadership among SMTs, other school staff and Ministry based SIP leaders.

Consistent with the findings of Arlestig’s (2006) study of communication between principals and teachers, the groups differed in their views of the actual leadership of the schools largely depending on their position in the system. The SMTs unanimously believed that they encouraged participation, they regularly consulted with staff and actively promoted collaboration. The respondents from among the staff did not totally agree. 50% of Capucin interviewees thought the SMT was

autocratic in its approach, with one member in particular being not very approachable. 60% of Kolibri respondents were of the view that certain members of the SMT were rather laissez-faire, and were not very consistent and sometimes slack in decision-making. At Sandragon the majority of interviewees expressed satisfaction with the level of consultation and the participative style of leadership, but 35% of them felt that staff took advantage of what was seen as the SMT's lack of firmness. This last problem seemed to plague Albizia in particular: over 75% of respondents believed the SMT was inconsistent in decision making and was generally too lenient with staff and students. Overall, a majority the teachers involved in this study seem to favour the more traditional authoritarian models of leadership and management, in spite of the SIP's aspirations.

In contrast, two thirds of the Ministry based SIP leaders were of the impression that there was a predominance of the authoritarian leadership style in secondary schools, although they noted that all the mechanisms were in place for them to be more participative in decision-making. Some saw this as an inability of leaders to move from a managerial to a leadership role, partly due to fears of losing control which was linked to anxieties about staff management. Others attributed this to the SMTs' difficulties in holding people accountable. Two members of this group, however, thought that the majority of school heads were laissez-faire in their approach.

Possible SIDS effects

It is now widely accepted that smallness of size can have far-reaching implications for the development of countries (Bray, 1991, Crowards, 2002, Armstrong and Read, 2003, Bush et al, forthcoming). As Bray suggests, the smallness of

communities can facilitate contact between people, reducing the power distances between them even in centralised bureaucracies. Conversely, personalised work relationships may encourage complacency and a tendency to avoid conflicts (Bray, *ibid*). The continuing impact of colonial legacies (Bray, 1993) and greater economic vulnerability (Easterly and Kraay, 2000) are some of the other characteristics of SIDS.

Respondents from the schools as well as from the Ministry felt that operating within a small, relatively isolated community had positive as well as negative effects on innovations. They all agreed that the smallness and immediacy of the community allowed schools to develop close contacts with other stakeholders - especially parents; to build strong and supportive community links and to tap into local resources and expertise. Two Ministry based SIP leaders also referred to 'elements of trust' that could serve schools well, for example in instances where parents may show greater trust in teachers and leaders they know from the community. The reverse of this, however, was alluded to by almost everyone interviewed on this issue.

Trust, they felt, was undermined by the fact that the highest authority of the Ministry was known by and was readily accessible to members of the community. Details of school as well as Ministry life became known to both parties (and others) in limited time. Confidentiality of information is problematic, giving rise to rumours and gossip. One Ministry-based SIP leader believed this, along with centralised bureaucratic control, seriously weakened the authority of the school.

Extensive knowledge of each other's lives served to fuel mistrust among staff within schools, between schools and the community and schools and the Ministry, according to most respondents. They observed the resulting reluctance of teachers to discuss and share their practices and experiences, the lack of esteem expressed by parents who may have personal knowledge of the private lives of teachers coming from the same community.

A fear of failure and losing face (Velayutham and Perera, 2004) by all concerned was also considered as a related factor. One of the Ministry based SIP leaders acknowledged that as a consequence the general tendency was one of conservatism, through maintaining the status quo and avoiding conflicts and confrontation, outlooks and attitudes which the SIP set out to change.

Summary

The schools' stated visions expressed fairly clear aspirations and values which were known at least in part by almost all teaching staff, although the extent of their involvement in the development of the visions was unclear. While the general feeling was that the visions did influence the ways people worked in the schools, it was also acknowledged that this was difficult to substantiate, and in each school about half of the respondents felt there was insufficient commitment to the vision. Perhaps as yet, the schools were not living their visions.

Development planning was perceived as the main tool for school improvement. It provided opportunities for self evaluation at whole school level and identifying areas for improvement. The auditing and planning processes were appreciated by all

school managers and staff, and certain targets set had been achieved, at least in part. However, there was also agreement that the implementation process remained haphazard. It was difficult for schools to appraise the extent of their success because the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and procedures often did not operate as planned. Links between the visions and the targets were not always evident and only some of the targets focused on teaching and learning.

There was unanimous agreement that professional development was beneficial to teachers in various ways and almost all respondents believed that new learning had influenced their teaching. However, concerns were raised about the limited involvement of staff in the identification of PD needs, in two schools especially. Most participants had reservations about the compulsory nature and timing of PD activities; the SIT and SMT members were inclined to view PD as a requirement of the Ministry rather than as a means of bringing about changes in staff perceptions and practice, as reflected by the restricted focus on student learning and routine types of PD activities.

The importance of effective school leadership was acknowledged by everyone involved in this study. Setting clear visions was associated with leadership roles but visioning remained a required aspect of the development planning process, without fully pervading the life of the schools. The leadership of the SITs ranged from almost dormant to operating constantly with an eye on the Ministry's expectations. School leaders believed that their participative approach was well suited to the Seychelles context and was appreciated by staff and students. The majority of teachers felt there was often a lack of firmness and problems of accountability while

the Ministry based SIP leaders thought school leadership to be generally authoritarian.

The SIDS context of the Seychelles was considered to be a significant factor in the institutionalisation of the SIP. The smallness of the system, centralised management and the closeness of the community facilitated the implementation of innovative projects, but bureaucratic control, the conservatism engendered by closeness, and personalised work relationships, impact significantly on the successful implementation of a model borrowed from a more open system.

The next chapter concludes this study. It briefly reviews the findings in relation to the research questions and considers the significance of this study for school improvement in the Seychelles and in SIDS.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview of the findings of this study, and it considers the extent to which the research questions have been answered. It also discusses the significance of the study for school improvement in small island developing states and begins to develop a school improvement model for school improvement in SIDS. It concludes with a set of recommendations for the Seychelles SIP.

Overview of Findings

The Seychelles School Improvement Programme intended to

work from within the administration of schools to bring about changes in school climate, management structures, and staff and pupil attitudes that would be more conducive to school improvement and lead to improved results for pupils (SIP Secretariat, 2000: 15).

The main strategies employed were the introduction and institutionalisation of development planning and school-based professional development, the strengthening of leadership capacities and shared visioning at school level. Support in development planning and leadership training were provided centrally by the Ministry of Education.

Ten years on, the Programme has become fully integrated into the state school system and, in the views of most teachers, SMT members and Ministry based SIP leaders, it has brought about certain far reaching and long term changes in the schools. All schools have three-year development plans which target specific areas for change within the school. The plans are generally linked to the schools' visions

and their implementation is led by SITs. Regular evaluations of the achievements of targets set are done by the SIT and reports are submitted to the appropriate sections of the Ministry of Education each term, and at the end of each planning cycle. The reports claim successes in the achievement of most of the targets in the development plans but as very limited evidence is provided to support the claims it is difficult to ascertain their validity. There is considerable reliance on the professional judgements of SIT members and the PDFs, giving the reports the characteristics of self-reports, which may bring their reliability into question. Limitations in the effectiveness of SITs, and the limited reflexivity of schools' self-auditing, further undermine the reliability and validity of the reports.

At school level, the SMTs, as well as the majority of teachers, believe that there have been improvements in certain aspects of school life, especially in terms of better internal communication, greater collaboration and sharing among staff within and between departments, for example in the development of school policies, and instructional materials. The Ministry based SIP leaders felt that teachers were becoming more open about their classroom experiences and practices, and they were more prepared to take on additional responsibilities to their normal teaching. The development planning process was considered a valuable tool for bringing about systematic change in schools by all participants. However, they also observed that it was not making much difference to students' performance and ways of sustaining improvements remained elusive. Many reasons were cited, mostly related to weak processes of monitoring and evaluation of action plans, inconsistencies in their application and a general 'lack of time'.

The institutionalisation of school based professional development was considered as another achievement, especially in the sense that all schools organised scheduled PD activities on a weekly basis. There was almost unanimous acceptance of the concept of school based PD and many teachers involved in the study claimed it had made a difference to their teaching, although the external QA evaluation reports found no evidence to support such claims. The co-ordinating role of the PDFs were appreciated by SMT members and teachers alike, and in one school staff felt that the PD plans reflected their expressed needs. Planned PD activities in the four schools were sometimes directly connected to the areas of priority for action. On the whole, however, less than a quarter of the planned PD activities were directly linked to teaching and learning and two of the schools were not even organising the required PD sessions during the period of this study. Many teachers from three of the schools expressed concern that PD plans did not take account of their needs. Almost all of them objected to the timing and the compulsory nature of PD. School leaders tended to leave all matters related to PD to the PDFs.

The study found divergent views about the type of leadership in secondary schools, and the impact it had on school improvement, often depending on respondents' roles in the schools or, in the case of Ministry based SIP leaders, in relation to schools. The Ministry based SIP leaders thought that, while schools had all the mechanisms in place to enable the practice of a more distributed style of leadership, school leaders remained autocratic in their approach. They argued that this was linked to issues of self-confidence and tradition. School leaders maintained that they encouraged the participation of others in decision-making and they promoted collaboration among teachers. They believed their styles of leadership were

appreciated by staff and students and that teachers shared their perceptions of what the schools were trying to achieve.

The significance of the schools' visions did not seem to feature strongly in the teachers' views of leadership. Their greatest concerns were related to student learning and student behaviour. Most teachers seemed to favour more autocratic styles of leadership, with staff at three of the four case study schools feeling that the actual management was laissez-faire or lacked firmness. A need for firmness on the issue of student discipline was mentioned by many of the teachers interviewed.

The effects of the characteristics of SIDS were considered in more negative than positive light, although it could be argued that the claims of greater openness and sharing among teachers may counter some of the negative effects such as mistrust and minimising conflicts.

Answering the Research Questions

This section considers in greater detail answers to the research questions, based on the findings and the data analysis.

Do the sampled schools have stated visions and do members of the school show allegiance to them?

Schools' development plans require a statement of their visions in the first pages of the document; thus all schools have vision statements. They tend to be stated in terms similar to Ministry of Education goals, with little that is specific to particular

schools. The extent to which members of the schools were involved in the vision development was not clear, but the SIT seemed to be the leading body involved in the process. It is therefore unsurprising that they were more aware of the aspirations of the visions than other staff members (mainly teachers), who explained that they were aware of the essence of their schools' vision statements, but they did not think it influenced their day to day practices. For both the SIT and the teachers the need for visions seemed to be regarded more as a requirement of the Ministry than the guiding element of school improvement. This was true even for Sandragon School where staff showed greater awareness of and sympathy with the school's vision.

SMT members expressed the strongest views about the schools' visions: they believed they communicated clear aspirations for the schools, that the majority of teachers were guided by them and that students were also aware of the school's visions. The Ministry based SIP leaders were also inclined towards this view of the influence of the schools visions, but two of them noted, however, that 'the visions were not lived'.

What are the main characteristics of development planning in Seychelles secondary schools, as represented by the sampled schools?

The SIP guidelines outline a process involving auditing, prioritising areas for action and target setting, monitoring the implementation of action plans, regular review and evaluation of the impact of the action plans.

In the auditing process, all the schools had narrowed down consultation to teachers only, by the third planning cycle. This seemed to have the effect of limiting the scope for self-evaluation with the result that there was little reflection on teachers' classroom practices and on students' learning. The process was further restricted in three of the schools, where the prioritisation of areas for action were carried out by the SIT only. Targets related to the selected areas of priority were then set at department as well as at whole school levels. Links between the departmental and whole school targets, and the areas of priority were not always apparent. This may be related to the disjointed nature of the prioritising and target setting exercises and the time lapse between the auditing and action planning processes (between three months and one year). Furthermore, the limited involvement of staff in the prioritisation exercise may affect their commitment to achieving the targets, even if action planning at department level was considered to have promoted more collaborative work among teachers.

Perhaps as a consequence of the limited critical reflection inherent in the schools' auditing exercise, only about half of the targets set in each school's current plans were directly related to teaching and learning. Of these many lacked rigour in the way they were stated and in the statement of their associated success criteria. Difficulties in measuring their impact were apparent in every development plan evaluation report. Little change was therefore evident at classroom level. Very few respondents (only four school staff and three Ministry based SIP leaders) questioned the type of evidence schools collected and criticised the wording of targets.

All members of the three groups consulted in this study – SIT and non SIT members in schools and Ministry based SIP leaders - felt there were adequate mechanisms in place for the effective monitoring and evaluation of the action plans. Within the schools there were the SIT, the SMT, and curriculum co-ordinating committees that brought together HoDs and SMT members; from the Ministry SI co-ordinators provided support to school leaders and teachers in the implementation of their development plans. Yet the monitoring of the implementation of action plans seemed to be one of the biggest hurdles in the SIP. Systematic monitoring did not happen for a wide range of reasons. The effectiveness of the SIT and the SMT were limited by a number of factors both internal and external to the schools. Regular review and evaluation of action plans seemed to take place in response to the Ministry's requirements rather than for the schools' own purposes.

To what extent is development planning seen by management and staff of the schools as a tool for school improvement?

All respondents agreed that development planning had given schools the capacity to focus on what they wished to change, to set clear targets and work towards achieving them. School leaders thought it had helped the management and teachers to reflect critically on the school's performance, and it encouraged greater involvement of staff in school activities. Both school leaders and teachers considered the benefits of development planning at organisational level more than in terms of improvements in students' achievements, while the Ministry based SIP leaders noted that school leaders and staff had not yet taken ownership of the process.

The school leaders and teachers also acknowledged the many difficulties encountered in the implementation and evaluation of the plans. However, they did not seem to have used the process to reflect on the nature of, and reasons for, such difficulties. Their major concern seemed to be to satisfy the demands of the Ministry.

What are the main characteristics of professional development in the schools?

School based professional development activities have become part of normal school life, with every state school being required to organise a one-and-a-half hour session of PD activities weekly, compulsory for all teaching staff. The planning and co-ordination of the activities are the responsibility of the PDFs, who are appointed in the position by the Ministry. A termly PD plan is produced by the PDF, in consultation with the SIT and to varying degrees, with staff. Only in one school did staff formally agree on the plan at the start of each term. In principle the PD activities are planned in conjunction with the schools' action plans, and they can take the form of workshops, presentations, and working group meetings, among others.

In practice, most of the PD activities are in the form of department based meetings and whole school presentations or workshops. The sessions are sometimes directly related to the schools' priority areas and most of the activities are not directly linked to teaching and learning in the classroom.

In what ways do management and staff link professional development activities to school improvement?

Most respondents perceived the links between PD and school improvement at a general level but, within the realities of their schools, while about half of them agreed there should be such links, these were not always obvious. School leaders noted the importance of PD that was closely linked to the implementation of the action plans, and about one third of teachers interviewed were concerned that some of the sessions did not reflect their needs.

To what extent are these professional development activities important to them?

All school leaders, and almost all staff, involved in this study expressed support for school based PD in principle and wished the concept to remain in school life. They thought that, as a result, staff had become more open towards each other and were more prepared to collaborate, and to share materials and experiences. However, the vast majority of teachers were unhappy about the timing, and resented the compulsory nature, of PD activities, although only a few of them had ventured to suggest alternative modes. The school leaders seemed unwilling to challenge the status quo although they agreed with the teachers.

To what extent do management and staff think the professional development activities of the school impact on their classroom practice?

A large majority of teachers interviewed felt they had learned new things, which had influenced their teaching to some extent, although only one or two teachers in each school were able to give specific examples of such instances. Some of the respondents explained that the PD sessions reminded them of aspects of teaching they already knew but that maybe they were not always practicing. School leaders expected that PD should make a difference to teachers' practices but they could not ascertain this.

What are the characteristics of school leadership in the sampled schools?

Leadership seemed to be vested in the SMTs, although the SIP implementation structures, such as the SIT and the curriculum co-ordinating committees, attempted to distribute power to other members of staff. The SMTs of the four schools expressed allegiance to the schools' visions and believed that to some extent staff were also guided by them. Their aspirations tended to be closely modelled on the Ministry's goals and their involvement with, and commitment to, the visions were not always evident. The focus of school leadership appeared to be administrative and managerial rather than visionary, with most of the school improvement initiatives being left largely to the PDFs and a few members of the SIT. Even in two of the schools where the SMTs were more directly involved in the implementation of the development plans, their roles remained mainly at a managerial level, in ensuring that the appropriate steps were followed.

While at one level, the involvement of the SIT and HoDs in leadership roles suggest a devolution of power, at another level there is limited co-ordination of these roles

and delegation of power seems to be primarily in response to Ministry/ SIP requirements. Thus some members of the SIT, in particular the PDFs, led the development planning process, as well as school based PD, with minimal interventions from the SMTs.

To what extent do headteachers and deputies think they practice participative styles of leadership, and why?

All members of the four SMTs all said they practiced participative and collaborative styles of leadership most of the time, and that it was the style best suited to Seychelles secondary schools, except for one headteacher who thought the staff misinterpreted her directness for authoritarianism.

All members of the SMTs thought that participative and collaborative styles of leadership should involve consultation with all stakeholders, especially with staff. They explained that they needed to take account of staff's views and ideas and that staff should be encouraged to take initiatives. They agreed that staff participation was important because otherwise it would be impossible to get people to work together. Divisions among staff, and resentment at imposed ideas and procedures, were cited by a few members of the SMTs as being the result of non- participative styles of leadership.

To what extent are the phenomena and conditions emerging from the foregoing questions, specific to SIDS?

Typical of centralised systems and small states, reform strategies tend to be top-down in orientation, although it should also be noted that, in practice, the distance between senior managers and school staff is not great because of the small scale of these education systems (Bray, 1991). This applies to the Seychelles SIP, which was initiated and led from the centre by a group of Ministry's middle managers, within a secretariat set up for the purpose. The situation brings to light a number of paradoxes. Although they were members of the central Ministry staff, the proponents of the SIP were attempting to promote school empowerment through school based development planning and staff professional development. The smallness of the system and their personal knowledge of it (including almost all school personnel) enabled them to push through an innovation that could have a wide and significant impact on the whole system (Bray, 1991). The model adopted, however, assumed the existence of a degree of school autonomy, coming as it did from a system (England) where school based management is the norm. This has proved difficult for school leadership in particular. Rather like the school improvement initiatives in Malta and in Trinidad and Tobago (Bezzina, 2002a; George et al, 2003), the contextual factors involved in importing the model into a highly centralised system do not seem to have been fully taken into consideration. Few adjustments were made at central Ministry level, while schools were expected to become more proactive and focused on bringing about change from within. At the same time the implementation of the programme was done through a prescriptive approach, which obliged schools to proceed in a rigidly uniform fashion.

For all the groups involved in this study, issues of accountability surfaced in a number of different ways. The adopted school improvement model implies the establishment of accountability processes throughout the system (Hopkins, 1996; Reynolds et al, 1996). The various stages of the development planning process demand commitment to a shared vision and to achieving the associated goals. School based PD activities aim to enhance staff capacities to achieve the targets they set. Distributed leadership seeks to share responsibilities among staff to lead actions so that everyone may feel involved in achieving the targets. Support and monitoring mechanisms for the SIP, set up by the Ministry, attempt to reinforce these aspects of accountability (SIP Secretariat, 2000). However, evidence from the study suggests that the whole notion of accountability has been accommodated by a highly selective approach to development planning both at school and Ministry levels.

At school level, the self-auditing process has been rendered ‘unthreatening’ by teachers omitting to question their classroom practices and assumptions about teaching and learning. The selected actions then target other areas such as behaviour management and organisational issues. Basing the evaluation of the achievement of targets largely on the SITs’ professional judgements, without the intervention of regular external evaluation, in a climate where the demands of the Ministry are perceived as the most significant, appears to sideline the need for evidence-based reporting. Rigorous monitoring of the implementation of action plans thus becomes less important; it avoids the need for applying too much pressure and possible confrontation with others (Bray, 1991).

At Ministry level, there seems to be awareness of these on-going accommodating processes, and similar strategies seem to prevail. There is strong insistence on documenting plans, record-keeping and reporting; there are no clear mechanisms that link successful implementation of the development plans with school performance, and the central planning and policy making arrangements barely acknowledge the specificities of individual schools. Ultimately, schools' development plans are approved by the senior management of the Ministry but the mechanisms to ensure effective support – financial support in particular – are not considered adequate by schools. This undermines the Ministry's position as gatekeeper, making it difficult to demand greater accountability from schools. Although the Ministry claims to fully support the improvement strategies of the SIP, it has not considered the need to question its centralised power position during the past ten years of the Programme's existence.

What are the factors that may enhance the schools' internal capacities to improve?

The institutionalisation of the SIP is in itself a significant factor in ensuring the continuation of the programme. Teachers' and school leaders' acceptance of it, their acknowledgements of the value of the school improvement processes suggest their willingness to eventually take ownership of the SIP. Enhanced support, a deeper integration of school improvement principles and practice in teacher training programmes and a strengthening of leadership roles in schools, may produce a shift to a more proactive stance towards school improvement. Active belief in, and adherence to, the school's vision may encourage better trained school leaders to

adopt shared leadership styles and involve more staff, students and parents in school development.

Reviewing the purpose and modalities of school based PD should help to make it more responsive to teachers' needs and to change teachers' negative perceptions of the present practices. Teachers' and school leaders' acknowledgement of the merits of school based PD should be a strong basis for such a review. Capitalising of these strengths should help to counter some of the negative effects of SIDS characteristics.

Postgraduate training in leadership and management for all school leaders may strengthen their belief in school empowerment and, with support from Ministry based SIP leaders, this may provide the impetus for the Ministry to reconsider the balance between pressure and support for SIP. Research in this area by Ministry personnel may also influence future policies on the further development of the programme.

Significance of this study

Empirical significance

The Seychelles School Improvement Programme is seen as a major innovation that was to change the way schools functioned and the way they approached teaching and learning. However, only two evaluations of the programme have been carried out over the ten years of its existence. Both of these examined specific aspects of the programme – teachers' perceptions of the SIP (Ministry of Education, 2000a)

and an evaluation of the SIP in primary schools (Ministry of Education/ HSRC. 2002), and both studies indicated only qualified success in the implementation of the programme. The present research is significant because it provides originality as the only study of school improvement in Seychelles secondary schools. It also contributes further insights into the development of the Seychelles school improvement initiative, complements the existing knowledge base on the SIP, and adds to the scant literature on school improvement in small states and in centralised systems.

The present study attempts to capture the multi-faceted nature of the SIP and the multiple forms of people's understanding of it, by examining the most salient aspects of the Programme from the perspectives of different stakeholders – namely teachers, SIT members, school leaders and Ministry based SIP leaders. It also takes a broader outlook than the previous studies, through considerations of the significance of the small island and centralised contexts into which the school improvement model was imported. Issues of policy borrowing are considered along with the possible effects of scale and limited resources, in the light of the participants' perceptions of the SIP. Consequently, the findings of this study may contribute to educators' reflections on effective teaching and learning and inform policy and practice. The limited number of schools in the system, and the fact that the researcher is an insider, should make this more easily realisable.

Theoretical Significance

As noted in the literature review, research on school improvement initiatives in small island states is very limited. Most school improvement models have their

roots in larger education systems, where power and authority are devolved and the professionalisation of teaching is already a reality (Lauglo,1995). Often the implication of such models is that they have universal application. The present study indicates that this is not so: the contextual and other factors involved in policy borrowing, the dynamics of education reforms in centralised systems and in small states, and the enduring influence of past colonial legacies, may combine to limit or re-orientate the application of models adopted without due consideration for the specificities of the receiving system. However, as Gronn and Ribbins (2003) propose, the real issue is the extent to which the system can use the model to its advantage and come up with ‘useful adaptations of practice’ (ibid: 88).

This study shows that the established model of school improvement, derived from large-scale education systems such as that of the UK, requires customisation to be suitable for small island states with centralised management systems. It can be argued that the impact of centralisation is tempered by the effects of small size, because there is sufficient space for mutual adaptations between the various stakeholders, and for the optimisation of the application of the model within a SIDS context. The limited scale of the school system, personalised work relationships, the ‘short power distances’ (Bray, 1991: 27) between policy makers and schools, and the inclination towards consensus may serve as positive factors in the process of adaptation. Additionally, school leaders and teachers’ understanding of the processes of the adopted model, and their acceptance of the concepts of the SIP, should facilitate the possibility of moving to a second phase in the SIP where schools could take the lead in re-positioning the Programme to make it more suitable for their particular circumstances and purposes. With the advanced

leadership training programme instituted four years ago, many school leaders should have the capacity to review school practices vis-à-vis the SIP and take ownership of the Programme. A clear articulation of a shared understanding of the evolving model – which this study hopes to contribute to - should make it easier for all stakeholders to clarify their roles, establish common purpose and bring the focus of school improvement on teaching and learning.

This thesis provides an evidence-based starting point for the construction of an alternative school improvement model, firmly grounded in the realities of small island states. The model in figure 10.1 below begins this process of adaptation.

Towards a model for school improvement in SIDS

The most crucial change needed in the present application of the model is a shift of focus to students' learning, along with a drive to harness the capacities and goodwill of all stakeholders. Factors such as leadership training, staff's readiness to accept the school improvement model, a shared understanding of the model, the acceptance of the concept of PD and perceptions of greater openness among staff, visioning and a systematic planning process, all in a SIDS context, should converge to bring about this change of focus. Of particular importance in this adaptation of the model is staff professional development that succeeds in bringing about changes of perceptions of teaching and learning, among teachers and school leaders. School leadership, enhanced by external support where necessary, should be instrumental in establishing professional development concepts better suited to the circumstances of the schools and, through that, build a shared understanding of school improvement and a sense of common purpose.

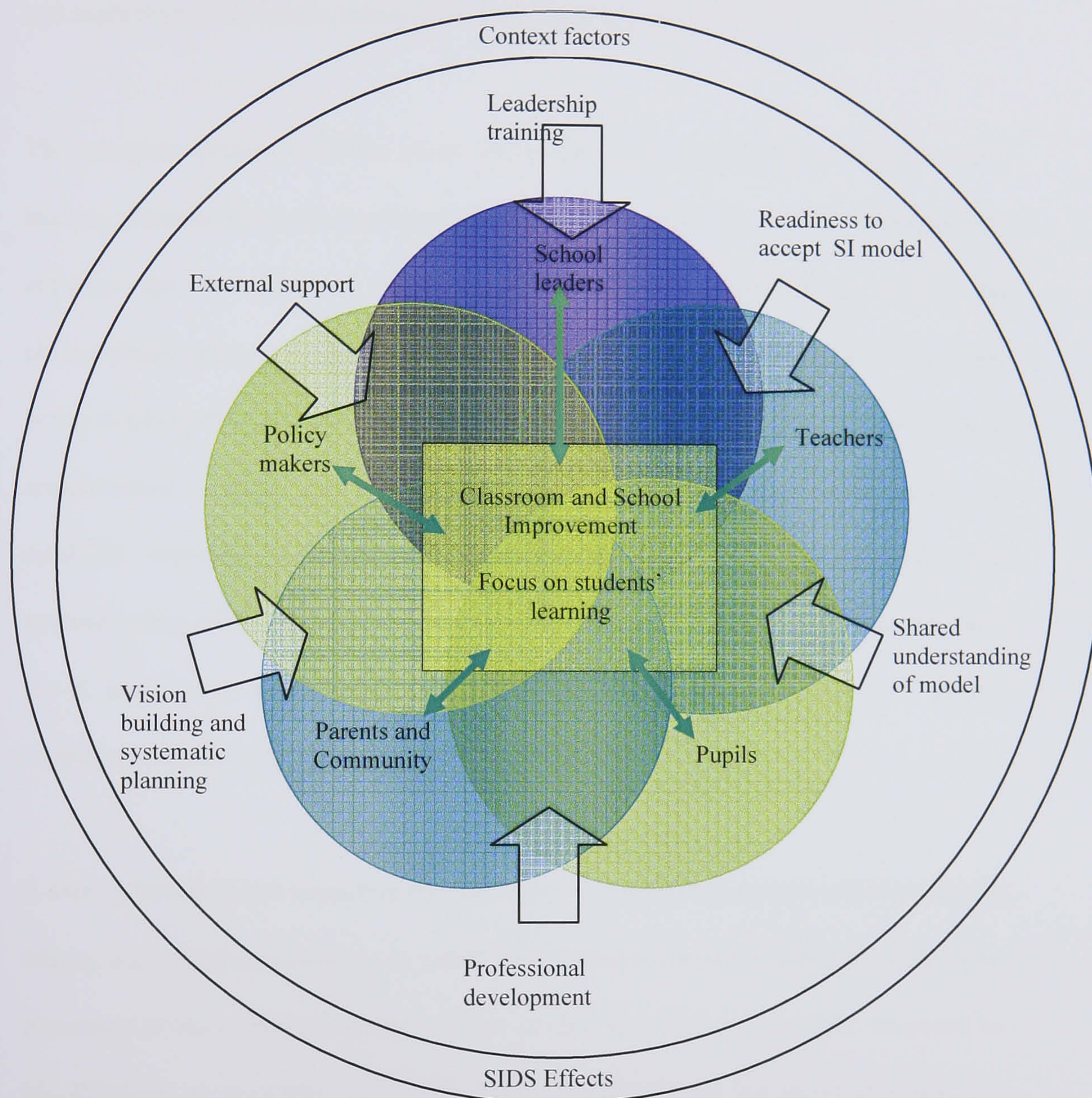


Figure 10.1: An illustration of the dynamics of school improvement in SIDS.

The interlinked circles represent the different stakeholder groups and their close interrelationships. The solid arrows indicate the two way interactions between the stakeholders and school improvement practices that focus on students' learning.

A clarification of roles at middle and senior management levels, and the increased involvement of students in school improvement initiatives, should help schools to

take greater ownership of the processes involved. Monitoring structures, processes and tools that evolve from schools, and suit their purposes better, should also help.

The compact system, and the close relationships between policy makers, school leaders, parents, students, teachers and the wider community, should substantially enhance the development of a genuinely shared understanding about the philosophies, purposes and expectations of the proposed reforms and strategies being implemented. A common understanding of the reform, and the model being implemented, a high level of readiness to use and adapt the model, ability to establish common purpose and to focus on students' learning, and clear understanding of the context of the reform by all stakeholders, may form the basis for a more successful 'indigenisation' (Philips and Ochs, 2003) of a school improvement model in the context of SIDS.

It should be noted however, that the tendency towards compromise, accommodating others, and avoiding conflicts, in small state contexts could undermine the dynamic processes of the proposed model. There is also the need to recognise, as noted by MacGilchrist et al (1995: 1), 'that there is no blueprint for improving schools, rather schools can be enabled to make intelligent, informed decisions about what is likely to work best for them'.

Recommendations

School staff and Ministry based SIP leaders should review the achievements and limitations of the SIP so far, in the light of the findings of recent research, and reconsider strategies that may enhance the Programme and embed it into the school

system. School leaders and SIT members should take the lead in this process by setting up review teams with agreed terms of reference, and with the approval and support of the Ministry.

The review should consider in particular:

- strategies for bringing the focus of school based development planning back to teaching and learning;
- support mechanisms that best serve the needs of schools;
- mechanisms that ensure greater accountability at different levels in the system.
- the organisation of school based PD which respond to the needs of teachers and schools, and which are directly related to improvements in teaching and learning.
- Strategies that will encourage teachers to become more deeply engaged in the process of SIP.
- Strengthening the capacities of school leaders, through facilitation of further professional development activities that may enable them to lead and support the SIP.
- Ways in which the Ministry of Education could enhance school-based decision making.

School representatives, together with Ministry based SIP leaders, should develop criteria that will help to determine what constitute ‘good schools’ in the Seychelles context, as a means of establishing standards for school auditing processes.

In view of the special importance of the development of people in small states, given their isolation, further research into possible models for school improvement in SIDS should be commissioned by the Ministry of Education and other agencies.

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Appendices

1a - Interview schedule – for SIT members and non-SIT members

1b - Interview schedule – for Ministry based SIP leaders

1c(i) - Interview schedule 1 – Respondent E, Kolibri School, SIT member

1c(ii) – Interview schedule 2 – Respondent X, Capucin School, non-SIT member

2 Observation checklist

3 The development planning cycle – the Seychelles model

APPENDIX 1a - INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

(For SIT members and non-SIT members)

1. School's vision

What is the school trying to achieve? (*Point out: In relation to the school's vision*)

Do you think the vision of the school influences the way people work here?
(*Explain: 'people' referred to here mean: school management, students and teachers*).

If so, in what ways, and to what extent?

2. Development Planning

How is development planning done in the school?

(*If necessary follow on with:*

Who are involved?

How are the school priorities determined?

How are action plans developed?)

How are the action plans implemented? Monitored? Evaluated? Achievements maintained?

How well do you think the development planning process has worked?

Where it hasn't worked so well, were you able to voice your views?

The school must now be in its third planning cycle; what changes has the various development plans brought at different levels in the school?

Do you think there have been improvements as a result of these plans?
(*If necessary: In what ways?*)

Are there links between development planning and improvements in the school?

3. Professional Development

How do PD activities happen in the school?

(*If necessary follow on with:*

How are they decided on?

What format do they take?

Who organises and leads them?

Who participate?

Where do they take place and how often?

What support can be obtained for PD?)

What kinds of activities work well? And what doesn't work so well? Why? (in each case).

Do you think PD has become accepted as part of normal school life?

Could it be done differently? How?

If you wanted to propose alternative modes, would that be possible?

Have you noticed changes (in attitudes, practice with regard to both students and teachers) in the classroom that may be linked to the PD activities?

Do you think PD activities have had any impact on school life?

[For all the ones who teach:-

Do you think the PD sessions have had any impact on your thinking? On your practice?]

Do you think it is important to keep the PD activities going? In what form?

4. Leadership

How would you describe the type of leadership in your school? Why?

What do you like / do not like about it?

Do you feel you have opportunities to take the lead in certain areas related to your work?

[For SMT members:-

How would you describe your style of leadership?

Do you think the management team, staff and students appreciate this style of leadership?

To what extent do staff participate in decision-making in the school? / take the lead in various aspects of the life of the school? (*Ask for examples*)

Do you think the fact that we come from a small community, and we know so much about each other, has an effect on the process of school improvement?

APPENDIX 1b - INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

(For the Ministry based SIP leaders)

1. School's vision

What kinds of factors have influenced the way schools have worked towards the visions they had for themselves? (Over the past six years?)

Do you think the schools' visions have influenced the way people work?
(*Explain: 'people' referred to here mean: school management, students and teachers*).

If so, in what ways, and to what extent?

2. Development Planning

How well do you think the development planning process has worked in the schools?

What changes have the various development plans brought at different levels in the schools?

Do you think there have been improvements as a result of these plans?
(*If necessary: In what ways?*)

Are there links between development planning and improvements in schools?
(If yes), what are they?

We are now starting on the third school development planning cycle; how do you see the process evolving over time?

3. Professional Development

Do you think PD activities have had any impact on school life?

Do you think PD has become accepted as part of normal school life?

Could it be done differently? How?

{What kinds of activities work well? And what doesn't work so well? Why? (in each case).}

Do you think there have been changes in attitudes and practice (with regard to both students and teachers) in the classroom that may be linked to the PD activities?

Assuming we keep PD in schools, what form should it take?

4. Leadership

How would you describe the style of leadership of most secondary school headteachers?

To what extent is there participative-decision making in secondary schools? (Ask for examples).

What are the factors that may inhibit the participation of staff in the decision-making process?

Do you think the fact that we come from a small community, and we know so much about each other, has an effect on the process of school improvement?

Appendix 1c(i)

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 1 – Respondent E; Kolibri school. SIT member.

1. School's vision

What is the school trying to achieve? (Point out: In relation to the school's vision)

I see the school's vision as: trying to get students more involved in their own learning; to motivate them so that they may get more involved in their own self-development, for example through the House system.

Do you think the vision of the school influences the way people work here? ('people' referred to here mean: school management, students and teachers). If so, in what ways, and to what extent?

In principle it should, and theoretically, the system is a good one. But in practice teamwork is weak. People don't like to take on responsibilities, they would rather pass on the problems to others, because these persons are there. For instance, it is hard to find a good class teacher who would be prepared to take on full responsibility for every child in her / his class.

2. Development Planning

How is development planning done in the school?

All staff are involved in the development and putting together of the plan, but in the past it had been sometimes difficult to reach decisions after so much discussion. Discussions and planning are usually led by the Headteacher, senior management team, and the PDF. Implementation is another problem, however. I was involved in the evaluation of the last plan, and there was a major problem of record keeping, which meant that the evidence for what had been achieved was not there. It was therefore difficult to determine what had actually been achieved. The new plan for the next three years has been well debated, and some good planning has gone into it. We'll see how it works.

How are the action plans implemented? Monitored? Evaluated? Achievements maintained?

These processes may happen at whole school or at departmental level, depending on what type of activities are involved. At department level we discuss the implementation of the plan as a group, and then depending on what the targets are, different people have different targets to monitor. With the earlier plans, it was mainly the responsibilities of the HoD's and HoY's to implement and monitor.

How well do you think the development planning process has worked? (if not so well, why?)

Monitoring didn't work too well: the roles of the different people involved were not clear. Now, with the new plan it may change, but it is still to be implemented.

Where it hasn't worked so well, were you able to voice your views?

Yes I can, and my views are taken into consideration. Maybe this is one of the reasons I've remained on The SI Team.

The school must now be in its third planning cycle; what changes has the various development plans brought at different levels in the school?

From when I came in January 2005, some things worked for a while, but the problem is consistency. For example keeping records of homework, attendance and punctuality of students, truancy, records are kept for a while but then gradually they stop. There's the example of the name box for students who misbehave: some people never did it at all, some start and then stop, others see unacceptable behaviour and turn the other way.

Do you think there have been improvements as a result of these plans?
(In what ways?)

As I said above, initiatives are taken, plans are implemented, but then actions are not reinforced and so we slip back; take the example of shoulder straps: we insisted on everyone having and worn properly but then the school relaxed, and students ignore the regulations. We also need to do things which are realistic, which are achievable. There are other times when students just don't want to comply; one example: some students in one of my groups said they couldn't do homework because they didn't have exercise-book. So I gave them some, but still they didn't do it. But we can't always blame the students, they are children and they often need guidance.

Are there links between development planning and improvements in schools?

Yes, there is a need to plan. We need to foresee things, and planning is important in order to make things happen, and improve on what we do. We have many responsibilities towards the children in the school; some of them see teachers in school for more time than they see their parents. So the school has a responsibility to provide guidance in various areas.

3. Professional Development

How do PD activities happen in the school?

Sessions take place on Thursdays, the kinds of activities organised are based on the development plan. The calendar for the year and the term is drawn up by the SIT, and they are guided by the needs expressed through the departmental audits which are done as part of the development planning process. Individual needs are taken into

consideration and they are given time at departmental level to organise activities, whereas common issues are taken up at whole school level. Sessions may be led by in-school people or by people from outside. The SI Co-ordinator also visits the school regularly.

What kinds of activities work well? And what doesn't work so well? Why? (in each case).

Department level activities work well. In our department we make sure we keep to the objectives and keep on task.

Do you think PD has become accepted as part of normal school life?

Generally yes, but there's still a bit of resistance. It was an imposition and the timing is not ideal: at the end of a day when we have to work more intensively because we have to make up the time, and the students tend to be more active knowing they finish early. And having it every Thursday, it becomes rather tiresome.

Could it be done differently? How?

If we have clear objectives set for the tasks to be done, and we could be given a specific time to achieve the objectives, say to be done in two weeks, then if we meet the objectives earlier than planned there'd be no need for the next week's session. There's always other work to be done anyway. In this way we could be more flexible and people may better accept the idea of PD.

If you wanted to propose alternative modes, would that be possible?

Yes; I haven't actually proposed these suggestions I've made above. I did at one point go home when we'd gone through our departmental sessions and met our objectives; there was no point just sitting around, but it was not taken too well at the time of my appraisal. Changing would be an example of 'risk taking' but it also depends on the power of the headteacher.

Have you noticed changes (in attitudes, practice with regard to both students and teachers) in the classroom that may be linked to the PD activities?

At the beginning, immediately after a sessions, yes; things change for a few weeks, but then they slip back, and so in the end nothing changes. For example, after the sessions on pastoral care, it was agreed that people would try and deal with student problems at classroom level. I was a class teacher then and we focused on good behaviour and punctuality and the class' outlook changed so much, for the better. But then they moved on and these things was not maintained.

What impact, if any, have PD activities had on school life?

PD is really a reinforcement of what we've been through in teacher training, so it should have an impact on our practice.

Do you think the PD sessions have had any impact on your thinking? On your practice?

Yes; they have helped me to reflect on what I've learnt in teacher training; they have shown me how to remain confident, and to keep on learning. I've come to see that it's important to respect students if we want to earn their respect.

Do you think it is important to keep the PD activities going? In what form?

It is, for various reasons: to remind teachers and students of what standards are necessary to maintain. To remind people of their responsibilities, and to allow for opportunities to change the plans if necessary; in the past the plans have been stuck to rigidly but sometimes there is the need to change along the way. The form PD could take would vary, as I've suggested above.

4. Leadership

What type of leadership do you think is best suited to your school?

Sharing of responsibilities, amongst the management and staff. It can't be authoritarian because people would resent it.

How would you describe the type of leadership in your school? Why?

There is shared leadership, but people are not making good use of it; they still want the authority figure who is there to solve all the problems, to whom they can send all their problems.

What do you like / do not like about it?

It's good that students feel they are able to get help from any of the members of staff. They don't have to always wait for the headteacher. They feel safe and secure even if the head is not around.

I'm not happy about the lack of consistency in decisions and actions that are taken; there's not always good co-operation and some people simply don't take their responsibilities seriously. They keep passing on problems, not realising or unwilling to see that they have the power to change.

Do you feel you have opportunities to take the lead in certain areas related to your work?

Yes, I can do, and I have done so.

Appendix 1c(ii)

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 2 – Respondent X, Capucin School. Non SIT member

1. School's vision

What is the school trying to achieve?

A sense of togetherness – teachers, management, students along with parents and the community. The school also wants to promote the personal well-being of students, creating a sense of belonging and a better working environment.

Do you think the vision of the school influences the way people work here?
If so, in what ways, and to what extent?

Yes, we have better relationships with parents; community leaders attend PTA meetings, they help parents who are sometimes reluctant to come to the school; they help us with obtaining materials to improve the environment of the school, such as grass cutting. Parents sometimes inform us of students misbehaviour in the vicinity of the school. Teachers also work more as a team, eg. when students are seen out when they shouldn't be, it becomes the concern of all staff.

2. Development Planning

How is development planning done in the school?

Based on whole school and departmental consultation; the first plans tended to be more whole school oriented, but this last one involved more discussion at departmental level, and most of the action plans are department based as well.

How are the action plans implemented? Monitored? Evaluated? Achievements maintained?

Once the action plans are drawn up individual teachers try to implement them at classroom level depending on the target to be achieved. There is regular consultation through department meetings and generally it's the HoD's who monitor the implementation of the plans. Evaluation is done at departmental level as well as at whole school level in the end.

Maintenance of achievements from previous plans is also planned for; eg. promoting French usage by getting students to speak to staff in French outside of classroom time: we keep trying to insist and up to a point it does work, although sometimes even the staff slip up.

How well do you think the development planning process has worked? (if not so well, why?)

There's been lots of improvement. Parents provide more support and the school is trying to implement agreed rules and to be consistent about it. There is more shared responsibility; class teachers and assistant class teachers, for instance, now share their responsibilities more equally.

There is still a bit of inconsistency in the way rules are applied; sometimes people depend too much on others to get things done, and parents are un-cooperative at times. So we don't always achieve the targets set.

Where it hasn't worked so well, were you able to voice your views?

Yes, the evaluation is done at departmental level and we can discuss the shortcomings.

The school must now be in its third planning cycle; what changes has the various development plans brought at different levels in the school?

Development planning adds to our workload, it's a lot of extra work, as we have to deal with our own subject areas as well as other work. Having the plans has made students and parents more aware of the importance of studies, it has helped the organisation of the school, preventing a laissez-faire attitude.

Do you think there have been improvements as a result of these plans?

As mentioned above.

Are there links between development planning and improvements in schools?

The planning process has provided a framework that has got us to see what's changed.

3. Professional Development

How do PD activities happen in the school?

SI Teams decide on the termly programme based on discussions at departmental and at whole school levels. Changes to the plan may be made depending on need that arise along the way. There are some 6 sessions which are departmental and the rest are whole school. The format they take depends on the plan, they may take the form of workshops, discussions, presentations, and sometimes we use the sessions for exam preparation at departmental level and to plan networking sessions with the feeder primary school.

What kinds of activities work well? And what doesn't work so well? Why? (in each case).

Sessions department-wise are good, they better match our needs. We can also bring in guest speakers at department level. Some of the whole school sessions such as 'anger

management' are good but sometimes when you have to listen to one person presenting a topic over a long time it gets boring, for instance like in the sharing of the department evaluations.

Do you think PD has become accepted as part of normal school life?

Yes, but there are still complaints. People still feel it is an imposition and they are not happy about the timing. Perhaps we should take the whole afternoon and finish at the normal school end time.

Could it be done differently? How?

Take the whole afternoon and perhaps it shouldn't be weekly. Already there is a certain amount of duplication between the weekly departmental meetings and the SIP sessions. We discuss the same type of issues.

If you wanted to propose alternative modes, would that be possible?

Yes, we can do so through the departmental meetings.

Have you noticed changes (in attitudes, practice with regard to both students and teachers) in the classroom that may be linked to the PD activities?

Teachers have got used to SIP. In instances where people just came with the intention of only teaching their subjects, they find it does help with planning, in particular lesson planning. (Meaning in spite of themselves they end up learning something).

What impact, if any, have PD activities had on school life?

The school is not so noisy; students' attitudes are changing gradually, their performance is getting better in some areas, worse in others. The departmental structure has made roles clearer in the schools generally. (a confusion of development planning and PD; being considered one and the same with same effects).

Do you think the PD sessions have had any impact on your thinking? On your practice?

I've gained a lot; I used to be reserved but now, through some of the PD sessions I've learned to share with others; rather than hiding away I find I can approach others and learn from them. Discussion and sharing of our classroom experiences have helped in this. Previously I would only teach at S1 level but now I have built up the confidence to teach across the range of levels.

Do you think it is important to keep the PD activities going? In what form?

Yes, but perhaps with some modifications, as mentioned above.

4. Leadership

What type of leadership do you think is best suited to your school?

Leadership that can keep an open door policy but maintain some firmness and authority.

How would you describe the type of leadership in your school? Why?

There is the feeling that the head is not very approachable. We clashed once but it has not affected our working relationship. She doesn't find it easy to accept criticisms and her way of addressing people sometimes upsets them.

At the same time firmness should be maintained, and people should not abuse on their authority.

What do you like / do not like about it?

The good thing is that cases are attended to promptly. We can approach members of management and discuss things. I like the way some of the management team members provide support. I don't like the way things are sometimes personalised, eg. after a committee meeting where we had agreed on certain activities related to environmental club it was announced in the next morning briefing that ' Miss Lindy decided ... ' as if it had been my decision only. At other times we say one thing and then do another: eg. there is a rule that students who come on bikes cannot cycle around from one part of the compound to another on them. And yet when students do just that in sight of the head she says nothing; similarly with students who had put in hair colouring.

Do you feel you have opportunities to take the lead in certain areas related to your work?

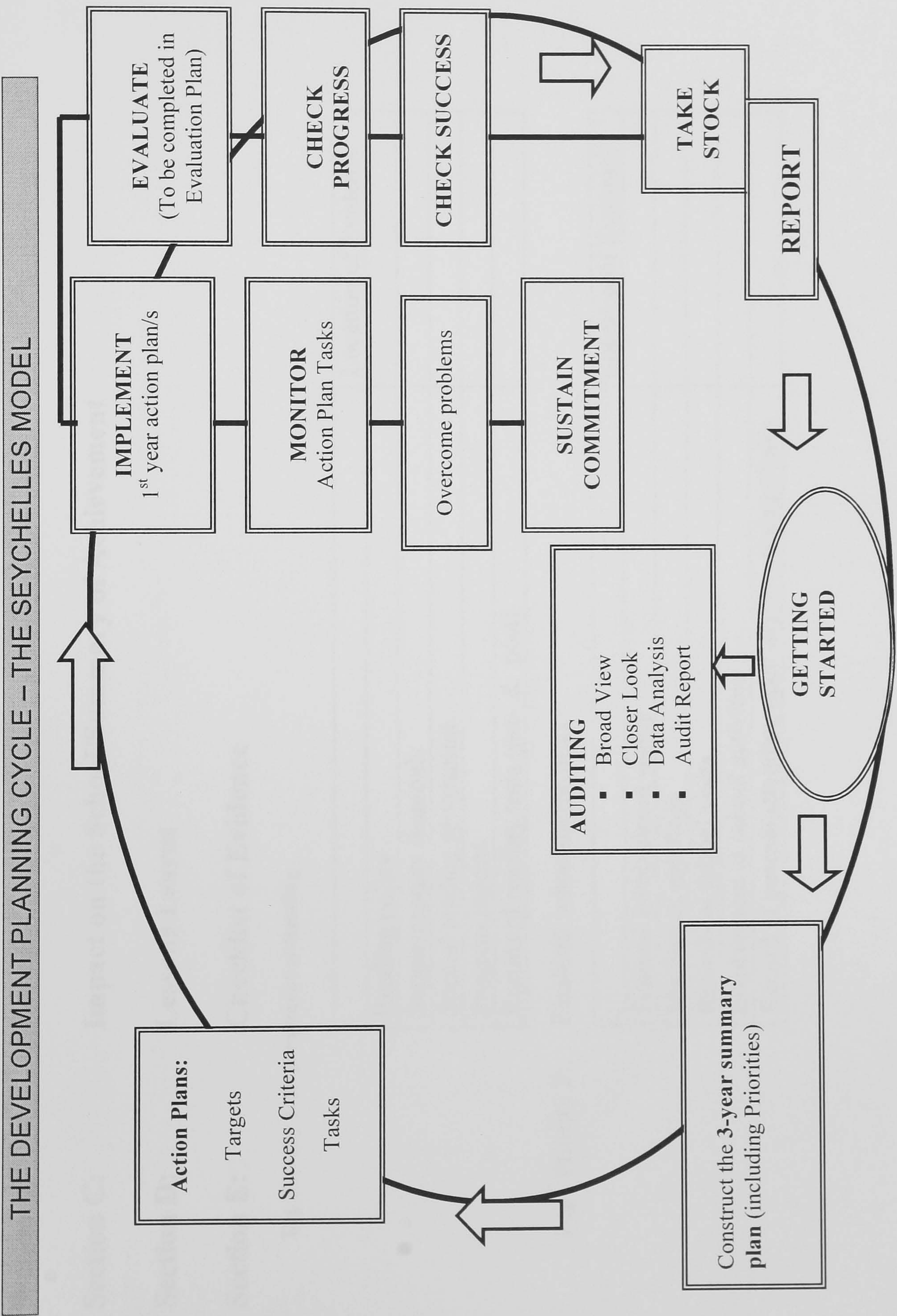
Yes, I'm leading the Wildlife Club and I'm on the school's environmental committee, and I can take the lead in these and other activities. I need only to inform the management and I have their support. In French teaching as well, I can consult, put forward various suggestions and carry them through.

APPENDIX 2 - OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

For each of the issues covered, the following aspects will be noted:

- How is the issue brought up, and by whom?
- How long does the person speak about it?
- What is the nature of his/ her contribution?
- How effective is the contribution? (in helping to achieve the objectives of the meeting?)
- What helped progress on the issue?
- What hindered progress on the issue?

(Depending on the type of meeting and aspects discussed, the questions will be adapted accordingly.)



Section B: Results

Section C: Impact on the School/Summary of Achievement

Section D: Lessons Learnt

Section E: Checklist of Evidence

E.g. Priority 1: Improvement of Reading

	Location of Evidence
Reading policy	
Supplementary materials	
Special reading programme	
Progress reports	
Results of reading tests (pre- & post)	

E.g. Priority 2:

Establish school-home links

	Location of Evidence
Parental involvement policy	
Minutes of meetings	
Records of school visits	
Involvement in school activities	
Record of parents attending open days/workshops/talks	

SDP/1	Summary of Audit		
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Key Area	Strengths	Areas of Concern

SDP /3 3 YEAR DEVELOPMENT PLAN						
KEY AREAS	PRIORITY:					
	TARGETS	YEAR 1:	YEAR 2:	YEAR 3: ...		
LEARNING	▪					
	▪					
	▪					
	▪					
PRIORITY:						
TEACHING	TARGETS	YEAR 1:	YEAR 2:	YEAR 3:		
	▪					
	▪					
	▪					
SUPPORT, GUIDANCE & PUPIL WELFARE	TARGETS	YEAR 1:	YEAR 2:	YEAR 3:		
	▪					
	▪					
	▪					

ACTION PLAN

SCHOOL:..... DATE OF PUBLICATION:.....

Priority:					
Target (What do we want to do)					
Success Criteria (How will we know if we have succeeded)	1) 2) 3)				
Actions/Tasks	Person Resp.	Resources	Time Scale	Staff Devel.	Monitoring

SDP /5

EVALUATION PLAN

Target:.....				
Performance Indicator:.....				
Information Source	Information to be collected	Collection Method	Responsibility	Time-line.

Date completed.....

Sheet No.....

SCHOOL BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

SCHOOL:

TERM:

PERSON RESPONSIBLE:

TARGET:

TOPIC:

Date of Session/s	Objectives of Session	Methods	Facilitator/s	Resources	Duration	Participants	Evaluation

students at the end of secondary schooling through the IGCSE of the Cambridge Examination Syndicate.

That the evaluation reports of the Seychelles SIP did not take into consideration the issues of centralisation / decentralisation and the effects of policy borrowing, is perhaps indicative of the evaluators' own assumptions about the innovation and its viability. Perhaps the reduced power distances (Bray, 1993) between the Ministry based evaluators and schools, and assumptions conditioned by colonial legacies, may have played a part in these decisions. As Bray (1993: 3) argues, often even the indigenous education specialists after training in the ex-colonial centres and having absorbed the ways of these dominant cultures, 'become severely detached from their own roots' and to a large extent lose their sensitivity to the local cultures. On the other hand, Gronn and Ribbins' (2003) point that cultural values and models inevitably get diffused in the process of borrowing, giving rise to a certain degree of 'cultural hybrids', also obtains.

One example of 'cultural hybrids' here is the notion of accountability which is closely associated with the Seychelles SIP model. Accountability processes are woven into the adopted school improvement model throughout (Hopkins, 1996). From a cultural viewpoint, the discharge of responsibility in a strongly personalised society may have different connotations and may be dealt with through different mechanisms, compared to western societies notion of accountability as 'rational practice' (Velayutham and Perera, 2004: 52). The authors suggest that 'accountability is a cultural practice closely related to the